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*THE DEANERY BALL.*



ON a certain May afternoon, when the air was so soft and the sun so brilliant that Mrs. Vrater, the wife of the Canon in residence at Gleicester, was inclined to think the world more pleasant than it should be, she was surprised by an invitation which promptly restored the due equilibrium. In her own words, it took her breath away. Despite some slight forewarnings, or things which should have served as such, she could hardly believe her eyes. Yet there it was before

her in black and white, and Italian penmanship; and, being a woman of character, instead of sitting down and giving way to her natural indignation, she—no, she did not accept the fact; on the contrary, she put on her best-bonnet and mantle, and contrived during this simple operation to efface from her mind all consciousness of the existence of the invitation. Thus prepared

she left the residence by the back door, and, walking quietly round the Abbot's Square, called at the Deanery. Mrs. Anson was at home. So was the Dean.

'My dear Mrs. Anson, the most ridiculous thing!' began the visitor; 'really you ought to know of it, though contradiction is quite unnecessary. It carries its own refutation with it. Have you heard what is the absurd report which is abroad in the city?'

'No,' answered the Dean's wife, who was sitting in front of a pile of cards and envelopes. Her curiosity was aroused. But the Dean had a miserable foreboding of what was to come, and writhed upon his seat.

'It is asserted that you are going to give a dance at the Deanery! Ha! ha! ha! I knew that it would amuse you. Fancy a ball at the Deanery of all places!' And Mrs. Vrater laughed with so fair a show of airy enjoyment that the Dean plunged his head into a newspaper, and wished he possessed the self-deceptive powers of the ostrich. This was terrible! What could have induced him to give his consent? As for Mrs. Anson, she dropped the envelope she was folding, and prepared for battle.

'Dear Mrs. Vrater, why should you think it so absurd?' she asked, smiling sweetly, but with colour a little heightened.

'At the Deanery? Why, your position, dear Mrs. Anson, and—and—how can you ask? It would have been quite a Church scandal. You would be having the Praeceptor hunting next. *He* would not stick at it,' with vicious emphasis. 'But I knew that you never dreamt of such a thing.'

'Then I fear that you are not among the prophets, for we really propose to venture upon it. As for a Church scandal, Mrs. Vrater, the Dean is the best judge of that.'

Whereat the Dean groaned, poor man. Mrs. Vrater regarded him, he regarded himself, as a renegade; but he showed none of a renegade's enthusiasm on his new side.

'You do intend to have a dance!' cried the Canon's wife, with well-affected surprise, considering the circumstances.

'We do indeed. Just a quiet evening for the young people, though we shall hope to see you, dear Mrs. Vrater. Times are changed since we were young,' she added sweetly, 'and we cannot stand still, however much we may try.'

If Mrs. Vrater had a weakness, it was a love for a style of dress which, though severe, was in a degree youthful. Her bonnet while Mrs. Anson spoke seemed to attract and fix that

lady's eye. It must be confessed that at Mrs. Vrater's age it was a youthful bonnet. However, she did not appear to heed this, but rose and took her departure with a shocked expression of countenance. She had given the poor Dean, her recreant ally, a very wretched ten minutes; otherwise she had not been successful. When Greek meets Greek neither is wont to get much satisfaction. She said no more there; but she hastened to pay some other friendly calls.

The manner in which the Dean came to give his consent must



be told at some length. There is a small house in a quiet corner of the Abbot's Square at Gleicester, which stands back a few yards from the general line of frontage. It is not alone in this respect. The Deanery on the opposite side of the Square, and the Praecentor's house—we beg his pardon, the Praecentory—in the far corner also shrink from the public gaze. But then there is, and very properly, the retirement of exclusiveness. In the small house in question such self-effacement must have a different origin; perhaps in the modesty of conscious insignificance, along with a due sense of the important neighbourhood in which No. 13 blooms

like a violet almost unseen. For Abbot's Square is virtually the Close of Gleicester—at any rate, there is no other—while No. 13 is little more than a two-storied cottage with a tiled roof, and outside shutters painted green, and a green door with a brass knocker. The path from the wicket-gate to the unpretending porch has been known to be gay with patterns now rather indistinct, composed of the humble oyster-shell; and the occupants have varied from a bachelor organist, or an artist painting the mediæval, to the Dean's favourite verger.

Such was the little house in the Abbot's Square; but Gleicester, sleepy old Gleicester, arose one morning to find a rare tit-bit of news served up with its breakfast. Mr. and the Hon. Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby, a fashionable couple bent on retrenchment, had taken No. 13 for the summer. They brought with them a letter of introduction from the Marquis of Gleicester, and owing to that, and something perhaps to the three letters which distinguished Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby's card from the pasteboards of the common throng, they were received by the Deanery people with enthusiasm, at the residence with open arms. The most select of coteries threw wide its doors to the tenants of No. 13. The Dean might be seen of a morning strolling in the little garden, and his wife's carriage of an afternoon taking up and setting down in front of the green shutters. The Archdeacon and the Praeceptor, nay, the very minor canons followed the Dean's lead. And Gleicester, seeing these things, opened its eyes—its mouth was always open—and awoke to the fact that the little house had risen in the world to a very giddy height indeed.

But the position which under these unforeseen circumstances No. 13 might assume was hardly to be understood by the lay portion of the city. The Abbot's Square and its doings were subjects of great interest to them, as to people well brought up they would be: but with a few exceptions, such as Sir Titus Wort, the brewer, and General Jones, C.B., and Dr. Tobin. These people gazed on that Olympus from afar. Possibly they called there and were called upon in return; but that was all. Their knowledge of the inner politics of the Square was not intimate.

They knew that the Dean's wife (Regina Jones) was a pleasant and pleasure-loving lady; but they had no idea that she was the leader of an organised party of pleasure, whose tenets were water-parties and lawn-tennis, who pinned their faith to the clerical quadrille (only square dances as yet), who supported the



Praecentor, the author of that secular but charming song, 'Love me to-day,' and who upheld theatricals, and threatened to patronise the City Theatre itself; a party who drove their opponents, headed by the Dean and Mrs. Vrater, and that grim clergyman the Archdeacon, to the verge of distraction; who were dubbed by the minor canons 'the Epicureans,' and finally whose heart and soul, even as Mrs. Dean was their head and front, was to be discovered in Canon Vrater.

The Canon deserves to be more particularly described. He was a man of handsome presence and mature age, pink-faced and white-haired, young for his years, and connected, though not so closely as Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby, with the nobility. Perfectly adapted to shine in society, he prided himself with good reason upon his polished manners, which united in a very just degree the most gracious suavity with the blandest dignity. They were so fine, indeed, as to be almost unfit for home use. He made it a rule never to differ from a woman, his wife (and antipodes) excepted, and seldom with a man. As he also invariably granted a request if the petitioner were well dressed and the matter *in futuro*, he was surely not to be blamed if his performances failed to keep pace with his promises. In fine, a most pleasant, agreeable gentleman, whom it was impossible to dislike to his face.

Yet I think the Archdeacon, a 'new man,' to whom the aristocratic Canon's popularity was wormwood, did dislike him. Certainly the Dean did not; he was a liberal-minded man in the main, but he had some old-fashioned ideas, and a great sense of his own position and its proprieties, and so perforce he found himself arrayed against his wife's party along with Mrs. Vrater and the Archdeacon.

Such was the state of things in the Abbot's Square when No. 13 received its new tenants. Now the Epicureans and now their opponents would gain some slight advantage. The vèrgers and beadles arrayed themselves upon one side or the other, and by the solemnity or levity of their carriage, the twinkle in the eye or the far-off, absent gaze, made known their views. The first lay clerk, a man qualified to talk with his enemies in the gate, gave monthly dances; the leading tenor assisted at scientific demonstrations.

But of what weight were such adherents beside the new-comers at No. 13? Which party would they join? If appearances might be trusted there could be little doubt. Mr. Curzon-Bowlby was a tall, long-faced man, with a dark beard and moustache.

His appearance was genteel, not to say aristocratic—but fatuous. He walked with an upright carriage and dressed correctly—indeed, with taste: beyond that, being a man of few words, he seemed a man of no character. His wife was unlike him in everything, save that she too dressed to perfection. A lively little blonde, blue-eyed and bewitching, with a lovely pink-and-white complexion, and a thick fringe of fair hair, she positively effervesced with life and innocent gaiety. She sparkled and bubbled like champagne; she flitted to and fro all day long like a butterfly in the sunshine. She charmed the Dean: the Canon declared her perfection. And though she was hardly the person (*minus* the three letters before mentioned) to fascinate his wife, she disarmed even Mrs. Vrater. And yet, whether the little woman of the world had, with all her apparent impulsiveness, a great store of tact, or that she was slow to comprehend the position, and was puzzled at finding the Dean arrayed against his wife, and Mrs. Vrater opposed to the Canon, she certainly dallied with her choice. Upon being invited to attend the science classes at the residence, she faltered and hesitated, and rather pleaded for time than declined. Mrs. Vrater, excellent woman, was pleasantly surprised; and determining to try again, went home with a light heart and good courage.

But this was before the little lady learned that the clerical quadrille—the party of progress, as has been hinted, wisely ignored the existence of round dances—was the burning question of the time.

‘Good gracious! Mrs. Anson,’ she cried, clapping her little hands, and her blue eyes wide with amazement over this discovery, ‘do you mean to say that none of your clergy dance? that they never dance at all?’

The Dean’s wife shook her head, and shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. She was a little out of temper this afternoon. Why was she not the wife of a cavalry colonel?

‘Not even the Canon? Oh, I am sure Canon Vrater does.—Now, don’t you?’

For the Canon, too, was in the little drawing-room. Small as the house was, our impoverished fashionables had not furnished all of it; but this room was a triumph of taste, in a quiet and inexpensive way. A man and a maid whom they brought to Gleicester with them made up the household. So there was an empty room or two.

‘No, Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby,’ he said; ‘if I danced I should be tripping indeed, in Gleicester opinion.’

‘You don’t! well, I am surprised. Now confess, Canon, when did you dance last? So long ago that you have forgotten the steps? Years and years ago?’ The old gentleman reddened, and fidgeted a little. ‘Canon, did you ever’—the little woman glanced roguishly round the room, and brought out the last word with a tragic accent positively fascinating, ‘did you ever—waltz?’

‘Well,’ he answered guardedly, with an eye to his friend Mrs. Anson, who was mightily amused, ‘I have waltzed.’

‘Something like this, was it not?’ She went to the piano and played a few bars of a dreamy, old-fashioned German dance; played it as it should be played. The Canon’s wholesome pink face grew pinker, and he began to sway a little as he sat.

She turned swiftly round upon the music-stool. ‘Don’t you feel at times a desire to do something naughty, Canon—just because it is naughty?’

He nodded.

‘And don’t you think,’ continued the fair casuist, with a delicious air of wisdom, ‘that when it is not very naughty, only a little bad, you know, you should sometimes indulge yourself, as a sort of safety-valve?’

He smiled, of course, a gentle dissent. But at the same time he muttered something which sounded like ‘desipere in loco.’

‘Mrs. Anson, you play a waltz, I know?’

She acknowledged the impeachment with none of the Canon’s modesty.

‘You are so kind, I am sure you will oblige me for five minutes. The Canon is going to try his steps with me in the next room. How lucky it is empty! and quite a good floor, I declare.—Now, Canon Vratér, you are far too gallant to refuse?’

He laughed, but Mrs. Anson entered thoroughly into the fun, took off her gloves, and sitting down at the piano played the same dreamy air. In vain the old gentleman pleasantly protested: he was swept away, so to speak, by the little woman’s vivacity. How it came about, whether there was some magic in the air, or in Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby’s eyes, the Canon was never able to make quite clear to himself, and far less to Mrs. Vratér, but in two minutes he was revolving round the room in stately measure, an expression of anxious enjoyment on his handsome old face as he carefully counted his steps, such as would have

diverted the eye of the charmed bystander even from the arch mischief that rippled over his fair partner's features. Had there been any bystander to witness the scene, that is.

'Hem!'

It was very loud and full of meaning, and came from the open window. The Canon's arm fell from the lady's waist as if she had suddenly turned into the spiky maiden of Nuremberg. Mrs. Dean stopped playing with equal suddenness, and an exclamation of annoyance. Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby, thus deserted in the



middle of the room, dropped the prettiest of 'cheeses,' and broke into a merry peal of unaffected laughter. It was the Dean. Coming up the oyster-shell path, there was no choice for him but to witness the *dénouement* through the green-shuttered window. He *was* shocked; perhaps of the four he was the most embarrassed, though the Canon looked, for him, very foolish. But nothing could stand against Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby's gaiety. She laughed so long, so innocently, and with such pure enjoyment of the situation, that one by one they joined her. The Dean at-

tempted to be a little sarcastic, but the laugh took all sting from his satire; and the Canon, when he had once recovered his presence of mind, and his breath, parried the raillery with his usual polished ease.

So Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby's freak ended in no more serious result than her own conversion into the staunchest of Epicureans, a very goddess of pleasure; and in familiarising the Dean's mind with the idea of the Terpsichorean innovation, until the proposition of a dance at the Deanery—yes, at the Deanery itself—was mooted to his decanal ears. Of course he rejected it, but still he survived the shock, and the project had been brought within the range of practical politics. Its novelty faded from his mind, and its impropriety ceased to strike him. He had never told Mrs. Vrater of her husband's afternoon waltz, and this reticence divided them. Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby exerted all her wiles; she gave him no peace. The plan was mooted again and again: he wavered, remonstrated, argued, and finally (thanks chiefly to No. 13), in a moment of good-natured weakness, when the fear of Mrs. Vrater was not before his eyes, succumbed. Be sure his wife and her allies left him no *locus pœnitentiæ*. Never was triumph greater. Within the week the minor canons had their invitations stuck in their mirrors, and rejoiced in their liberty. And Mrs. Vrater made a certain call upon Mrs. Anson, of which the reader knows.

But Mrs. Dean's pleasure was not unclouded. There were spots upon the sun. The Dean was not always so tractable, and the Deanery house was not large, and the garden positively small. True, a gateway and a descent of two or three steps led from the latter into the picturesque cloisters, which had lately been cleaned and repaired, and the sight of this suggested a brilliant idea to flighty Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby. She lost no time in communicating it to Mrs. Anson, who received it at first with some doubt. Her friend, however, painted it in such pleasant hues, and set it in so many brilliant lights, that later she too became enamoured of the project, and boldly proceeded to carry it into execution.

The Dean stumbled upon this magnificent plan; in so many words, stumbled upon it, in a rather unfortunate way. He was taking his wonted morning stroll in the garden two or three days before the 24th, the date fixed for the now famous dance. His thoughts were not upon it at the moment: it was a bright

sunny day, and the balmy life-inspiring air had expelled the regret which it must be confessed was the Dean's normal frame of mind as to his ill-considered acquiescence. He was not thinking of what the Bishop would say, or what the city would say, or, worst of all, what Mrs. Vrater had said. He turned a corner of the summerhouse a few yards from the steps which we have mentioned as leading to the cloisters, and as he did so with the free gait of a man walking in his own garden—bump!—he brought his right knee violently against the edge of some object, a packing-case, a half-opened packing-case which was lying there, where, so far as the Dean could see, it had no earthly business. The packing-case edge was sharp, the blow a forcible one. For a moment the Dean hopped about, moaning to himself and embracing his shin. The spring air lost all its virtue on the instant, and his regret for his moral weakness returned with added and local poignancy. For he had not a doubt that the offending box had something to do with the 24th. As he tenderly rubbed his leg he regarded the box with no friendly eyes. To school-boys and policemen, and the tag-rag and bobtail, a sharp blow on the shin may not be much; but stout and dignified clerics above the rank of a ritualistic vicar are, to say the least of it, not accustomed to the thing at all.

‘What the—ahem—what in heaven’s name may this be?’ he exclaimed with irritation. Resentment adding vigour to his curiosity, he gingerly removed the covering from the case, which appeared to be full of particoloured paper globes of all shapes and sizes. They were symmetrically arranged; they might have been tiny fire-balloons. But the Dean’s mind reverted to infernal machines, the smart of his shin suggesting this line of thought. He put on his glasses in some trepidation, and looking more closely made out the objects to be—Chinese lanterns.

The sound of a hasty step upon the gravel made him turn. It was Mrs. Anson, looking a little perturbed—by her hurry, perhaps. Her husband lifted one of the lanterns from the case with the end of his stick, and contemplated it with a good deal of contempt.

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘what in the name of goodness are these foolish things for?’

‘Well, you know the house is not very large,’ she began, ‘and the supper will occupy the dining-room and breakfast-room—it would be a pity to cramp the supper, my dear, when we have

such beautiful plate, and so few chances of showing it—and conservatory we have none, so——’

‘Yes, yes, my dear, true,’ broke in the Dean impatiently; ‘but what of these? what of these?’ He raised the poor lantern anew.

‘Well, we thought it would be nice to—to light the cloisters with these lanterns, and so form a conservatory of a kind. Now that the cloisters are cleaned and restored they will look so pretty, and the people can walk there between the dances. I thought it would be an excellent arrangement, and—and save us pulling your study about.’

There was an awful pause. The lantern, held at arm’s length on the ferrule of the Dean’s stick, shook like an aspen leaf.

‘You thought—it would be nice—to light the cloisters—with Chinese lanterns! The cloisters of Gleicester Cathedral, Mrs. Anson! Good heavens!’

No mere words can express the tone of amazed disapprobation, of horror, disgust, and wrath combined, in which the Dean, whose face was purple with the same emotions, spoke these words. He dashed the lantern to the ground, and set one foot upon it in a manner not unworthy of St. George—the Chinese lantern being a natural symbol of the dragon.

‘It would be rank sacrilege; sacrilege, Mrs. Anson. Never let me hear of it again. I am shocked that you should have proposed such a thing; and I see now what I feared before, that I was very wrong in giving my consent to a frivolity unbecoming our position. You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled. But I never dreamt it would come to this. Let me hear no more of it, I beg.’

The Dean, as he walked away after these decisive words, felt very sore—and not only about the knee, to do him justice. He repeated over and over again to himself the proverb about touching pitch. Until the last few days, no one had cherished his position more highly. And now his very wife was so far demoralised as to have suggested things dreadful to him and subversive of it. He had given way to the Canon and that little witch at No. 13, and this was the first result. What a peck of troubles, he said to himself, this wretched dance was bringing upon him! He was sick of it, sick to death of it, he told himself. So sick, indeed, that when he was out of his wife’s hearing he groaned aloud with a great sense of self-pity, and almost brought himself in his disgust to believe that Mrs. Vrater would have been a more fit and sympathetic helpmeet for him.



And Mrs. Dean was bitterly disappointed. She had set her heart upon the cloisters scheme, and in most things she had been wont to enjoy her own way. Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby had depicted it in such gorgeous hues, and portrayed so movingly the guests' admiration and surprise—and envy. Oaklea Castle, the seat of the Marquis of Gleicester, with its spacious and costly conservatories and fineries, could present no more picturesque or charming scene than would be afforded by the many-arched cloisters brilliantly lighted and decorated, and filled with handsome dresses and pretty faces still aglow with the music's enthusiasm. Mrs. Anson had pictured it all. But she was a wise woman, and a comparatively old married woman, and she recognised that the matter was not one for argument. Not even to the Canon, her ally, did she confide her chagrin, being after her husband's outburst a little dubious of the light in which the project might present itself to him.

Only into Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby's bosom did she pour her sorrow without reserve. That lady made a delicious *move* after her fashion on hearing of the Dean's indignation, but she seemed almost as disappointed as Mrs. Anson herself. 'And he actually forbade you, dear?' she asked, with her blue eyes full of pity and wondering surprise.

'Well, he told me never to let him hear of it again.'

'Oh!' answered the little woman thoughtfully, and was silent for a time. When she recovered herself she changed the subject, and soon coaxed and petted her friend into a good humour.

Still this was a large spot on the sun of Mrs. Anson's triumph. And yet another, a mere speck indeed in comparison, and very endurable, appeared at the last moment, the very day before the 24th. The Dean was summoned to London; was summoned so privately, so peremptorily, and so importantly, that the thought of what might come of the journey (there was a new bishopric in act of being formed) almost reconciled his wife to his absence; and this the more when she had effectually disposed of his suggestion that the party should be indefinitely postponed. The Dean was not persistent in pushing his proposal; the harm, he felt, was already done. And besides, being himself away, he would now be freed from some personal embarrassment. It must go on; if he went up it would signify little. So he started for London very cheerfully, all Gleicester knowing of his errand, and the porters at the station spying a phantom apron at his girdle.

When the evening, marked in the minor canons' rubric with so red a letter, arrived, the excitement in the Abbot's Square rose to a great height.

Vague rumours of some surprise in store for the guests, which should surpass the novelty of the dance, were abroad. Strange workmen of reticent manners had passed in and out, and mysterious packages and bundles, as self-contained as their bearers, had been seen to enter the Deanery gates. A jealous awning, which altered the normal appearance of the garden as seen from the second-floor windows of the Square, hid the exact nature of the alteration, and served only to whet the keen curiosity of the Gleicester public. Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby, from No. 13, ran to and fro, smiling with a charming air of effervescent reserve, which raised Mrs. Anson's older friends to an aggravated pitch of curiosity. The Square knew not what to expect. Conjecture was—in more senses than one, as the event proved—abroad.

For no one had in the least foreseen the spectacle that met their eyes upon their arrival. Certainly not the Bishop, though he betrayed no surprise; good cheery man, he was every inch a bishop, and therefore by tradition a great-hearted, liberal-minded gentleman. Certainly not Sir Titus Wort, nor General Jones, much less the Archdeacon. No, nor even the minor canons; their anticipations, keen as long abstinence from such enjoyments could make them, had yet fallen far short of the scene presented to their gaze upon entering the Deanery garden.

Even Canon Vrater—at home, it was rumoured, in courts; he had certainly once lunched at Windsor—stood in almost speechless wonder by the garden steps.

'It is very beautiful!' he said simply, gazing with all his eyes down the arched vista formed by the tree-like pillars of the cloisters; the brilliant light of many lanterns picked out every leaf of their delicate carving and fretted broidery, and made of their fair whiteness a glittering background for the dark-hued dresses of the promenaders beneath. It was indeed more like fairy-land than a part of the cathedral precincts. Those who traversed it every day looked round and wondered where they were.

'It is very beautiful!' That was all. And he said it so gravely that Mrs. Anson's spirits, elevated by the open admiration of the bulk of her guests, would have fallen rapidly had she not at that moment met the arch glance of Mrs. Curzon-Bowlby. That lady,

a very mistress of the revels, was flitting here and there and everywhere, witching the world of Gleicester with noble womanhood.

Nor was the sight less of a surprise to the Canon's wife. But Mrs. Vrater, as was to be expected, had more to say upon the subject. She had taken possession of the youngest and most timid of the minor canons, and even he was lifted a little above himself by the scene and a chance smile shot in his direction by the mistress of No. 13. Still he was not sufficiently intoxicated to venture to disagree with the resident Canon's lady.

'I never thought I should live to see this or anything like it!' she said, with a groan of grimmest disapprobation.

'No, indeed,' he assented, 'nor did I.' But it is doubtful if he meant quite the same thing as the lady.

'This will not be the end of it, Mr. Smallgunn,' said Cassandra, nodding her head in so gloomy a manner that it recalled nothing so much as a hearse-plume.

'Not a bit of it,' he answered briskly. But again it is a matter of some uncertainty whether the two wits—supposing that so irreverent an expression may be applied to Mrs. Vrater's wit—jumped together. He not improbably in his mind's eye saw a succession of such evenings strewn like flowers in the minor canons' path; and this was not at all Mrs. Vrater's view. She felt that there was a lack of sympathy between them, and left him for the Archdeacon, with whom she conferred in a corner, glowering the while at the triumphant Epicureans, who strutted up and down the carpeted cloisters, and flirted their fans, and spread their feathers like peacocks in the sunshine.

And there were moments when Mrs. Dean felt as proud as a peacock: but then there were other times when she felt quite the reverse. True, she fully intended strenuously to perform, so far as in her lay, her husband's order, 'never to let him hear of it again,' quite heartily and sincerely; that amount of justice must be done her; she intended to obey him in this, only she doubted of her success. And being in the main a good woman, with some amount of love and reverence for her husband, there were moments in the evening when she turned quite cold with fear, and wondered who or what on earth could have induced her to do it. But her guests saw nothing of this; nor did it occur to them, whatever might be their private views, that their hostess had the smallest doubt of the propriety of her picturesque arrangement—her guests

generally, that is. There was one exception—the gay, laughing, sail-with-the-wind little lady from No. 13.

But she did not form one of the group around Mrs. Anson during the last dance before supper. It was a waltz, and it had but just commenced, the rhythmical strains had but just penetrated to their nook within the cloisters, when suddenly, with some degree of abruptness, the music stopped. They, not knowing their hostess's train of thought, were surprised to see her turn pale and half rise. She paused in the middle of a sentence, and could not disguise the fact that she was listening. The others became silent also, and listened as people will. The dancing had ceased, and there was some commotion in the house, that was clear. There were loud voices, and the sound of hurrying to and fro, and of people calling and answering; and finally, while they were yet looking at one another with eyes half fearful, half assuring, there came quite a rush of people from the house in the direction of the cloisters. Mrs. Anson rose, as did the others. She alone had no doubt of what it meant. The Dean had come back—the Dean had come back! The matter could not be disguised; she was caught literally *flagrante delicto*, the cloisters one blaze of light from end to end. How would he take it? She peered at the approaching group to try and distinguish his burly form and mark the aspect of his face. But though it was hardly dark in the little strip of garden which separated them from the house, she could not see him; and as they came nearer she could hear several voices, if it was not her imagination playing her tricks, naming him in tones of condolence and pity. Then another and, as she was afterwards thankful to remember, a far more painful idea came into her mind, and she stepped forward with a buzzing in her ears.

‘What is it, James? The Dean?’ with a catch in her voice.

‘Well, ma’am, yes. I’m very sorry, ma’am. There’s been a—’

‘An accident? Speak, quick! what is it?’ she cried, her hand to her side.

‘No, ma’am, but a burglary; and the Dean, who has just come, says—’

‘The Dean, James, will speak for himself,’ said her husband, who had followed the group at a more leisurely pace, taking in the aspect of affairs as he came. He had heard the latter part of her

words, and been softened, perhaps, by the look upon her face. 'You have plenty of light here, my dear,' with a glance at the illumination, in which annoyance and contempt were finely mingled; 'but I fear that will not enable our guests to eat their supper in the absence of plate. Every spoon and fork has been stolen; a feat rendered, I expect, much more easy by this injudicious plan of yours.'

Which was all the public punishment she received at his hands. But his news was sufficient. Mrs. Dean remembered her magnificent silver-gilt *épergne* and *salver* to match—never more to be anything but a memory to her—and fainted.

Mrs. Vrater, too, remembered that *épergne*. It was the finest piece in the Dean's collection, and the Dean's plate was famous through the county. She remembered it, and felt that her triumph could hardly have been more complete; the shafts of Nemesis could hardly have been driven into a more fitting crevice in her adversary's armour. This was what had come of the clergy dancing, of the Dean's weakness, and Mrs. Anson's secular frivolity and friendships! Mrs. Vrater looked round her with a great sense of the wisdom of Providence, and ejaculated, 'This is precisely what I foresaw!'

'Then it is a pity you did not inform the police,' answered her husband, tartly.

But his lady shook her head. In the triumph of the moment she could afford to leave such a gibe unanswered. The Arch-deacon was condoling with the Dean in terms almost cordial, and certainly sincere; but Mrs. Vrater was made of sterner stuff, and was not one to lose the sweetness of victory by indulging a foolish sympathy for the vanquished. She would annihilate all her enemies at one blow, and looked round upon the excited group surrounding Mrs. Anson to see that no one of that lady's faction was lacking to her triumph.

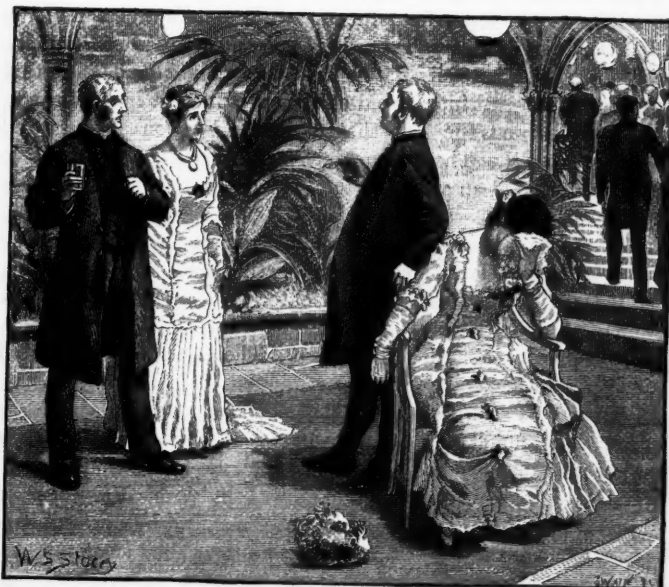
What was this? Surely she was here! The prime mover, the instigator of this folly, should have been in closest attendance upon her dear friend? But no.

'Where is Mrs. Curzon-Boulby?' Mrs. Vrater asked rather sharply, what with surprise, and what with some pardonable disappointment.

'I believe,' said the Dean, turning from his wife, who was slowly reviving—'I believe that the Hon. Mrs. Curzon-Boulby is in the Mediterranean.'

'In the Mediterranean? why, she was here an hour ago.' The man's head was turned by the loss of his cherished plate.

'No, not Mrs. Curzon-Boulby, as I learned before I left London. Some one so calling herself was, though she too is probably far away in the up train by this time, and her plunder with her. To her and her confederates we are indebted for this loss.' The Dean may be excused if he spoke a little bitterly.



'Good Lord!' cried the Canon, dropping the glass of water he was holding.

'I felt sure of it!' cried his wife, in a tone of deep conviction.

As the party entered the house, which was in huge disorder, full of guests collecting their wraps and calling for their carriages, of imperative policemen and frightened servants, the Dean drew back. He returned alone to the cloisters, and very carefully with his own hands extinguished all the lamps. As the faint moonlight regained its lost ascendancy, falling in a silver sheet pale and pure upon the central grass-plot, and dimly playing round the

carven pillars, the Dean closed the gate and heaved a sigh of relief.

And so ended the Dean's ball, the triumph as brief as disastrous of the Gleicester Epicureans. The dreams of the minor canons have not become facts. They may play lawn-tennis, may attend water-parties and amateur theatricals—nay, may play cards for such stakes as they can afford, but the dance is tabooed. The Dean is Dean still, and is still looking hopefully—what Dean is not?—to the immediate future to make him a bishop. And Mrs. Dean is still Mrs. Dean, but not quite the Mrs. Dean she was. As for No. 13, its day of prosperity also closed with that night. It relapsed into its old condition of modest insignificance, nor ever recalled the fact that a reverend canon had waltzed within its walls. The green shutters and oyster-shells are no longer considered an anomaly, for they adorn the residence of a master mason.

One more episode of that evening remains to be told. The Canon and his wife walked home together, and if he said little, she left little to be said. Upon entering the dining-room the Canon sat down wearily. The servant, surprised to see them return so early, brought in the lamp. The Canon looked, rubbed his eyes, and looked again.

'Mary,' he said, 'where is—don't be alarmed, my dear; Mary has no doubt put it upstairs for safety—where is my great silver tankard? Ah, yes; and the goblets, too, where are they?'

'If you please, ma'am,' said Mary glibly, answering rather Mrs. Vrater's agonised look than the Canon's question—'if you please, ma'am, the Hon. Mrs. Curzon-Boulby called after you left, and said she'd run in to borrow them for the Deanery claret-cup, as they'd be short of silver.'



### MADAME D'ARBLAY.

WITHIN the last year or two Madame d'Arblay's novels have been republished with an appreciative introduction, and modern readers may discover for themselves whether they can understand the raptures with which the author was welcomed into the literary world. The last edition of 'Cecilia' is separated by just a century from the first; and some critics have asserted survival for that period is the true test of an author's title to be a classic. How far Madame d'Arblay deserves that name is problematical. Even her most zealous admirers, however, will scarcely venture to place her in the first class. Her reputation is not as the reputation of Miss Austen. We may dissent from the orthodox view without suffering excommunication. If we do not read 'Evelina' simply from a sense of duty we require the stimulus of curiosity. We seek in her pages for illustrations of the manners and customs of the times or of the development of a literary fashion. We do not become so deeply absorbed in the books themselves as to forget for the time all extrinsic interests. No book can be said to be thoroughly alive which is not capable of blinding us for the time to everything outside its own pages. It must be whilst we read our whole world—the sole reality, which makes all outside tangible things mere transitory phantoms. When reading Miss Austen, we can believe in Emma Woodhouse, and consider the young ladies of our own families as characters in fiction. But no such illusion, no inversion, however temporary, of the worlds of fact and fancy is possible to the student of 'Evelina' and 'Cecilia.' The 'genial' critic, indeed, still simulates enthusiasm and calls everybody a dullard who dares to dissent. Let us hope that he believes in his own utterance, and take courage to admit that we would rather read one volume of 'Cecilia' than five. And when once we admit that the novels are most interesting chiefly from the historical point of view, it becomes a question whether genuine history is not preferable.

The 'Diaries' and the 'Memoirs of Dr. Burney' are fully as lively as the novels; and we prefer portraits of Boswell and George III. to Lord Orville and Mr. Delville, who are less

interesting in themselves and whose adventures are not very thrilling. Miss Burney, however, is worth a study in more ways than one. We can see many interesting people through her eyes, and her novels mark at least an important transition in the art. Her personal story is sufficiently familiar from Macaulay's essay; and, whatever be Macaulay's shortcomings, we always have the advantage in following him, of knowing that a firm and distinct outline of fact has been vigorously put down in unmistakable black and white on his readers' memories. Macaulay's article, indeed, was obviously prompted by something besides simple zeal for Madame d'Arblay. He was delivering a damaging blow at his old enemy Croker; and it is worth while to look back at the articles which gave the offence. Poor Madame d'Arblay undertook in her old age to publish three volumes of Memoirs of her father, Dr. Burney. She was eighty in the year (1832) of their publication. To most people it would seem that, if her dates were rather vague, and that, if her own figure appeared rather prominently in the foreground of her own recollections, the weakness was natural and pardonable enough. Croker, however, fell upon her in one of those fine slashing articles which are happily less common than of old; he hit upon an expedient well adapted to give pain to his victim.

It had been reported—where or when it does not appear (probably from a hasty identification of the author with her heroine)—that 'Evelina' was written at the surprisingly early age of seventeen. Madame d'Arblay did not say so herself; but neither did she deny it. Still the vagueness of her dates might seem to give some colour to the statement, supposing it to have been made; and undoubtedly she does lay a good deal of stress upon her youthfulness at the time of composition. Accordingly Croker, so it is said, put himself into a post-chaise and went all the way to Lynn to examine the parish registers. He discovered, to his unspeakable triumph, that Frances Burney had been christened in 1752. Beyond all doubt, then, she was twenty-five when 'Evelina' actually appeared at the beginning of 1778. He came back overflowing with virtuous complacency. He felt as one who had unmasked a wicked impostor. He was not the man to bring out this great discovery incidentally or modestly, or to spare the feelings of an old woman whose guilt he had laid bare. He wrote an article in which the criticism of the book is merely by the way, and the whole pith and

point of which is this mighty revelation. A hint of it is given in the opening pages; but it is not yet to be set forth. It must be duly emphasised with a sufficient blast upon the critical trumpet. We have to look at Madame d'Arblay's vanity from different points of view to prepare us for believing in her atrocity. It must be shown that the success of 'Evelina' was due chiefly or exclusively to the belief in the youthfulness of the author; and then, when all is ripe, this crushing disclosure is brought forth as the counsel for the prosecution of a criminal produces the clenching and damning bit of evidence which is to make defence impossible.

When, some years later, the posthumous Diaries were published, Croker returned to the charge, and once more exulted in his discovery. Certainly one can understand Macaulay's desire to retaliate; though his angry retort—namely, that Croker was a bad writer, whose spite Madame d'Arblay 'had provoked by not furnishing him with materials for a worthless edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson, some sheets of which our readers have doubtless seen round parcels of better books'—strikes one as being slightly irrelevant. Croker's mighty discovery might have been met by quiet contempt. Miss Burney, as her Diary shows, did in fact get a good deal of credit for her youthfulness. Mrs. Thrale, talking to Johnson, quoted the precedent of Pope's 'Windsor Forest,'<sup>1</sup> which is rather oddly ambiguous; for Pope published this poem at twenty-five, but claimed to have written the chief part of it at sixteen. Mrs. Thrale would probably have this claim in her mind when referring to the poem as a precedent of precocity; but it is also certain that she knew her young friend to be over twenty in 1779; and, indeed, could hardly be so far wrong as to suppose her to be anything like seventeen at the time of publication.

Madame d'Arblay's own account is that she burnt all her childish manuscripts on her fifteenth birthday, and continued in her head one of the destroyed stories which ultimately became 'Evelina.' The composition is thus extended over a very indefinite period, the final redaction taking place some time before the actual publication in her twenty-sixth year. That her friends and she herself should be rather inaccurate is natural enough; and if in her old age she inclined to favour the more flattering

<sup>1</sup> It is fully discussed by her last editor; who is not perfectly fair, however, in considering the reference to *Windsor Forest*.

hypothesis, nobody but the bloodthirsty reviewers of her period would have cared to dwell upon such a trifle.

The error would tend to prove, indeed, that Madame d'Arblay had a certain share of vanity. Nobody who reads her books can have very much doubt upon that point. She was most unmis-takably vain; but her vanity need hardly offend the most morose of critics. It is the vanity which goes with good-nature, and implies a sort of touching confidence in her readers. How could she be otherwise than vain? No young author was ever exposed to a more intoxicating chorus of admiration. Richardson's great success was not achieved till he was past middle life; Sterne published the first volumes of '*Tristram Shandy*' at the ripe age of forty-five; Scott was well past thirty when he published the '*Lay of the Last Minstrel*,' and past forty when he published '*Waverley*.' To find any instance of a sudden youthful popularity equal to hers we must go back to Pope, or onwards to Byron or Dickens. Now, with the exception of Scott, none of these famous authors have escaped the charge of excessive vanity; and more than one of them showed unmistakable signs of moral deterioration of a more serious kind.

If Fanny Burney's celebrity was not quite so wide as in their case, the want of quantity was amply made up by the quality. She seems to have been still treated as a girl up to the time of her celebrity. Her father, who was strikingly like herself—an excitable, vivacious, sociable, impulsive creature—had been for years popular in London society. He knew all the wits, and was petted in the great houses. 'To enumerate the friends and acquaintance with whom he associated in the world at large,' says his daughter, 'would be nearly to ransack the Court Calendar, the list of the Royal Society, of the Literary Club, of all assemblages of eminent artists; and almost every other list that includes the celebrated or active characters then moving, like himself, in the vortex of public existence.' But Fanny had scarcely emerged from the nursery; she had been left to pick up her education for herself; her proposal to publish a novel had been treated as a school-girl's joke; she had ventured only to the extreme edge of the 'vortex'; she had seen Garrick when he came to play with the children; gone on a visit with her father to the opera, or taken a back seat at the concerts which he sometimes gave in his own house. She had looked on in reverent awe when for the first time the gigantic Johnson rolled himself into their drawing-

room, and twitched and twirled and fell into brown studies, and bestowed a huge smack upon her elder sister, and scandalised the musical circle by asking whether Bach was a piper. Suddenly she became the centre of all admirers. Johnson did her homage after his elephantine fashion, compared her advantageously to Richardson and Fielding, quoted his favourite passages, and actually mimicked the characters; Reynolds forgot his dinner, and had to be fed whilst reading; Burke sat up over it all night; Sheridan offered to take a comedy from her pen without even reading it—a proposal as characteristic, perhaps, of Sheridan's carelessness as of his admiration; 'all the Streathamites' emulated each other in compliment; and the magnificent Mrs. Montagu condescended to bestow some notice upon this new ornament of her sex. If she danced round the mulberry-tree in Mr. Crisp's garden upon hearing such news, and kept a diary to record the multitudinous fine things that were pouring in upon her from all the recognised literary authorities of the day, it is certainly not surprising.

Clearly a young lady who could have kept her head under such a welcome from men to whom she had hitherto looked up from an indefinite distance as the intellectual sovereigns of her world would have been more than human. But this does not by any means prove that her head was not turned; only that the turning implied no inordinate vanity as a previous condition. It is, in fact, evident enough that Miss Fanny did begin to think herself a very wonderful person indeed. She collected all the sugar-plums for the benefit of her family, and of good Mr. Crisp, the amiable misanthropist, who was as much a father to her as Dr. Burney. We can doubtless count upon our innermost circle for honouring certain drafts upon their admiration which seem rather extravagant when presented to the outside world; and yet that innermost circle has its terrors for a modest person. Miss Austen, one fancies, with her keen eyes for humbugs of various kinds, would have made certain deductions from such flatteries, had she been unlucky enough to receive them, and even when passing them on to her sister or her brothers, have allowed a sub-sarcastic smile to appear upon her face. Some little reservation, some admittance of the possibility that praise may be not entirely sincere, is necessary—much as most of us enjoy flattery—before we can make up our minds to relish its sweetness, even when we are passing it on to our second selves. We wish, it may be, to

propitiate the jealous gods who punish excessive complacency, and to take some precautions for breaking our fall in case the shrine upon which we are elevated should not be composed of thoroughly sound materials. But Miss Burney shows no signs of misgiving. She swallows the flattery whole. Page after page of the *Diary* is full of conversations, in which all the brilliant wits and intellectual ladies are constantly circling round 'Evelina;' resort to it for telling illustrations; ridicule any luckless wight who does not immediately take an allusion to the Branghtons or Madame Duval; unite to make him ashamed of his ignorance; take Miss Burney aside to pour out the fulness of their hearts; or carry on little discussions in her presence as to their favourite passages. In her old age Madame d'Arblay had developed the peculiar style which alone could do justice to the subject. 'The climax of her glory was reached,' she says, 'when Johnson and Burke vied in praising "*Cecilia*," each animated by the spirit of the other in the noblest terms that our language, in its highest glory, is capable of emitting.' . . . 'Thus, radiant with a warmth which Sol in his summer's glory could not deepen,' she says, 'had gone on the winter to 1783, through the glowing suffrage of the two first luminaries that brightened the constellation of genius of the reign of George III.—Dr. Johnson and Edmund Burke.'

Miss Burney, however, had not adopted this strain of eloquence at the time. Her *Diaries* explain the process by which her style was being spoilt, but are not themselves the worse for it. In the early volumes we have a vivid portrait of the society in which Boswell has made us at home as Boswell would himself have given. We can hardly admit that she makes Johnson himself better known to us; though Miss Burney must have been a very inferior artist had she not caught a telling likeness of his features. But the little pictures of Streatham society, of shrewd social Mrs. Thrale in particular, worthily fill up gaps in Boswell's description; and such glimpses as that of the society at Brighton, with the quaint, blustering, gallant old Irish dandy, Mr. B——y, are at least as spirited as anything in 'Evelina.' Unfortunately, we can trace the approach of the catastrophe which was to ruin the author. Nobody who made so brilliant a start has ever ended in so lamentable a failure.

'Evelina,' whatever its shortcomings, when put beside the best work in its class, can at least be read with an understanding

of its astonishing success. It would be a mistake to say that 'Cecilia' succeeded because it was by the author of 'Evelina;' for it contains, especially in the earlier part, a great deal of writing which is equal to 'Evelina' in style and spirit, and the story is far more carefully worked out. But it is also true that a great deal of 'Cecilia' is now intolerable; the style at once slipshod and pompous, and the sentiment absurd. Her later writings were a tragedy which failed and was never printed; the 'Camilla' which some people are believed to have read, and report as full of extravagant sentimentalism, and 'The Wanderer,' of which there is not even a tradition that anybody ever got beyond the first pages. Many people have failed to follow up a first success; but so complete a decline, so sheer and hopeless a fall from the heights of popularity to utter unreadability is scarcely to be paralleled. The failure does not appear to have been due to any want of care.

'The Wanderer,' according to Madame d'Arblay, was the result of ten years' labour, and 'Camilla' seems to have been elaborated as carefully as 'Cecilia.' We might, if we pleased, attribute it to the miserable years passed in her splendid house of bondage. Undoubtedly one can hardly imagine a more unfavourable condition for the development of her powers. She had quite sufficient acuteness to see the ludicrous side of her position. She reads a description of herself in a French newspaper, where she is said to be 'a person whose most extraordinary literary talents had so fascinated *Sa Majesté la Reine de la Grande Bretagne* that she had appointed her *surintendante* of all her wardrobe.' 'It really,' says Miss Burney, 'read so Irish a compensation stated in that manner that I could scarce read it with gravity;' and yet the statement was substantially accurate. Miss Burney was rewarded for 'Evelina' and 'Cecilia' by the place of ladies' maid to the Queen.

Her duties were attending her mistress's toilette, and her pleasures the society of an illiterate and preposterous old German lady, resembling her own Madame Duval so absurdly that, but for the dates, one might have supposed an intended portrait, and of half-a-dozen equerries and other sublime domestics. Others besides Croker have condemned poor Miss Burney for her lamentations. She ought, it is said, to have known perfectly well what to expect. Her duties were clearly explained to her; and she was past thirty when she went into service with her eyes open. She grumbled, it is said, because she did not receive the admiration for



which she thirsted. She expected to be surrounded by adorers, and unluckily most of the gentlemen whom she saw were already married; and the one equerry—called 'Fairly,' in the Diary and really a certain Colonel Digby—with whom she got up a kind of flirtation failed her cruelly. He was a widower, and used to come and pour his sorrows into her willing ears; and find opportunities to enlarge upon the consolations of religion, and to read Akenside's 'Pleasures of the Imagination,' and other substitutes for Tennyson and Browning current in those days. Unfortunately he consoled himself more effectually, to her evident vexation, by marrying another lady (called 'Fuzilier' in the Diary), and after that time, poor Miss Burney broke down completely, and had no resource against the scoldings and petty tyrannies of the Schwellenberg. If, as certainly seems probable, Miss Burney had a little tenderness for Colonel Digby, and was bitterly depressed by the end of her flirtation, she may perhaps be thought to deserve rather compassion than condemnation. Most readers, in fact, will sympathise unreservedly with Macaulay's indignant denunciation of the selfishness of the 'sweet Queen' who allowed a woman of education and genius to wear herself out in menial duties, and still more in condemning the easy-going father, who evidently thought that a daughter at the palace might do him some useful offices, and who, even when he saw her health breaking down and her spirits destroyed, could hardly be persuaded by the indignant remonstrances of Burke and Windham and Boswell and the whole Literary Club to allow of her resignation.

It is, however, not quite so easy to judge of Miss Burney herself. Are we to regard her worship of the Royal Family as a beautiful example of old-fashioned loyalty lingering into uncongenial times, or as marking the period at which loyalty was transforming itself too easily into contemptible flunkeyism. Perhaps the line was never quite so easily drawn as we fancy. The grand old cavalier who gave his life in the loftiest spirit of unselfish devotion might be more easily corruptible than we could wish in the unwholesome atmosphere of Whitehall. Miss Burney, we fancy, was not altogether as clear-headed in this matter as she might have been. She could see the foibles of her Royal master as clearly as anybody. The Diary gives us a portrait of George II. which exactly falls in with the wicked fun of Peter Pindar or of the Probationary Odes (in the 'Rolliad'). 'Methinks I hear,' says one of those bards—

Methinks I hear,  
 In accents clear,  
 Great Brunswick's voice still vibrate on my ear—  
 'What? what? what?  
 Scott! Scott! Scott!  
 Hot! hot! hot!  
 What? what? what?'  
 O fancy quick! O judgment true!  
 O sacred oracle of regal taste!  
 So hasty and so generous too!  
 Not one of all thy questions will an answer wait!

So, on her first interview with the King, the great man cross-examined her about 'Evelina':—

"But what? what?—how was it?" "Sir," cried I, not well understanding him. "How came you—how happened it—what?—what?" "I—I only wrote, sir, for my own amusement—only at some odd idle hours. That was only, sir, only because——" I hesitated most abominably, not knowing how to tell him a long story, confused at these questions; besides, to say the truth, his own "What? what?" so reminded me of those vile Probationary Odes, that, in the midst of all my flutter, I was really hardly able to keep my countenance." She was obviously in a false position; the poor little satirist, brought face to face with her idol, and unable to dull her own perceptions, is throughout like a worshipper seized with a sense of the ludicrous in church. She had indeed to go through some genuine tragedy, when the poor King went out of his mind; but all through her story we see the keen-eyed observer painfully united in a single person with the would-be abject adorer. To be brought into the very innermost shrine, and see the object of your aspiration a kindly, commonplace, and thoroughly stupid old gentleman—to be forced into the proverbial position of valet to a hero, is clearly a most uncomfortable state of things. On the whole, we must say that in this struggle between the two selves, the abject worshipper rather gets the best of it. Miss Burney contrived to make Madame Schwellenberg the scapegoat for all the satirical impulses generated by her position. The King and Queen can never do wrong; they are always excusable for overlooking the sufferings of their dependent; they cannot be expected to manifest a consideration to which they were never educated; if they show a touch of human feeling, play with their little child, or say a civil thing to an inferior, it is a proof of their angelic condescension; if a young prince drinks too much and forces others to

drink, it is delightful affability ; and if some constitutional question has to be decided about their dignity, the fate of Europe hangs trembling in the balance. Even Macaulay is rather indignant when Miss Burney attends the impeachment of Warren Hastings, and presumes to be cold to her father's warm friend, Burke, for taking the wrong side. We have often wished, it may be said, in passing, that some keen satirist would show us the reverse side of that great scene in Westminster Hall, described in a famous 'purple patch' in Macaulay's essay on Warren Hastings. We should like to know, for example, how many of the actors in all that splendid assemblage were better qualified to have any opinion in the matter than Miss Burney herself? Magnificent as the spectacle may have been, was it not in substance a solemn dramatic enthronement of utter ignorance, hopeless prejudice, or bigoted self-interest upon matters which were entirely beyond the sphere of knowledge of the performers? As for Miss Burney, it was of course enough for her that the Court was supposed to be on the other side. She knew, as well as anybody knows now, that George III. was not a Solomon. But her instincts of loyalty or servility told her that whatever cause he approved must be the cause of justice and virtue ; and how many people have better reasons for their judgments in our enlightened period? When this or that young lady sympathised with Napoleon III., or Garibaldi, or Abraham Lincoln, or Jefferson Davis, and felt indignant with Mill or Carlyle for taking the opposite side, were they more or less foolish? In any case, would they deserve any solemn oburgation for their rash little outbursts of enthusiasm? Miss Burney no doubt took up all the prejudices of the atmosphere in which she lived ; not the less keenly because she felt it to be unwholesome in some ways for herself, and could even see very clearly the weak side of the sacred personages whom it surrounded. In those early days of the French Revolution, such an indiscriminating enthusiasm was too natural to justify any severe judgment. We need only say that she was an impetuous little loyalist, and loathed everything connected, however remotely, with Robespierre and Tom Paine. Probably her descendants are not much profounder.

And yet, it must be added that we cannot altogether admire her sentiments. She crouches rather too exuberantly before her Royal mistress. Her father gets most of the blame for not removing her from her bondage. Perhaps he deserves it.

But, to say the truth, they seem to have been uncommonly alike in temperament. They had an amazing supply of fine sentiment always on hand, which somehow does not impress upon one a conviction of its reality. They meet with ecstasy and correspond with effusion; but they seem to part with perfect ease and go their own separate ways. The father lets his daughter pick up an education anyhow; cares nothing about her book till it succeeds; leaves her in the palace till everybody but himself sees that she is seriously weakened; disapproves of her marriage to a ruined French emigrant, and is reconciled just as easily when he can't help it; and never interferes with her conduct except to prevent her producing a play, when he anticipates a ludicrous failure. They keep up all the language of the most affectionate father and daughter; but, what with his musical parties and his social engagements, and the claims of other members of his family, they seem to have lived perfectly independent lives. She stays with her second 'daddy,' Mr. Crisp, or with Mrs. Thrale, or Mrs. Delany, or whoever it might be, and remembers at intervals that she is the most affectionate of daughters, and writes a letter in character. He remembers her when it strikes him that her talents or reputation may be useful to him, and poses with perfect complacency as the affectionate parent, though the most selfish could not have behaved worse. The conversation in which, after seeing next to nothing of him for four years, she has a long talk with her 'dearest father' is a charming specimen of their relations. He is full of gaiety, but complains that some distinguished foreigners have attacked him for not introducing them to his daughter. His excuses brought out, to their astonishment, the fact that she had no holidays. He apparently then began to think himself that in fact it was rather odd. Poor Miss Burney hereupon breaks out as to all her miseries; and he nobly says, after a struggle, that if she is forced to resign, he will—receive her in his house. 'The emotion of my whole heart at this speech—this sweet, this generous speech—oh, my dear friends, I need not say it.' It was, she declares, her 'guardian angel, it was Providence in its own benignity, that inspired him with such goodness!'

The noble being, having actually consented to receive his own daughter, if her health made it absolutely necessary, she succeeded in little more than a year in bringing him up to the mark of definitely approving her resignation; and, on regaining

her freedom, seems to have taken up her abode with her married sisters and other friends. If we are left to wonder whether Miss Burney's loyalty was such as entirely to blind her, we are constrained to ask whether her filial affection was equally powerful. Dr. Burney, in her *Memoirs*, is never mentioned without superlatives of the most glowing panegyric; but somehow the impression is conveyed that he was a proficient in that valuable art of life which enables a man to get all possible comforts out of his domestic relations, and to take the responsibilities with marvellous light-heartedness. Nobody could be a pleasanter companion; and the flow of affectionate sentiment broke out again at any moment, just as freely after interruptions borne without a sign of discontent. The daughter appears to have been perfectly satisfied, and to have gone her own way with equal complacency.

In short, we can partly understand the view which some of her contemporaries seem to have taken, that she was an accomplished little flatterer, who could make herself charming by an exuberant display of enthusiasm, not very serious or very deeply rooted. To make such a judgment at all fair, we should doubtless have to add that she was a good wife and mother, and of a really kindly though sufficiently vain nature, who was quite as much the dupe of her own fine sentiments as anybody else, and probably the last to see through them. If this should seem a little harsh, we must notice that it is the only explanation of her literary deterioration. Macaulay, who dwells rather solemnly upon the defects of her later style, seems to ascribe her weakness to an imitation of Johnson. He thinks that Johnson actually assisted her in '*Cecilia*;' though he must surely have overlooked the passage in the *Diary* (November 11, 1782) in which Johnson expressly denies that he had seen one word of the book before it was printed. The resemblance is easily explicable by an imitation of the standard authority of the time. Her latest editor accounts for her degeneracy by saying that her English was not based upon Latin. To us it seems quite as likely that Latin studies would have corrupted her early style as that they would have preserved its purity. In any case, the bad style is surely a symptom of something more serious than this. The *Memoirs* of Dr. Burney are written in a marvellous mixture of stilted and pure English—the latter being chiefly the reproduction of early letters and diaries—which Macaulay gravely denounces, but which we are rather inclined to call delicious. One phrase may

be given as a sufficient illustration:—‘If beneficence be judged by the happiness which it diffuses, whose claim, by that proof, shall stand higher than that of Mrs. Montagu, from the munificence with which she celebrated her annual festival for those hapless artificers who perform the most abject offices of any authorised calling, in being the active guardians of our blazing hearths?’ This is translated in a footnote:—‘Every May-day Mrs. Montagu gave an annual breakfast, in front of her new mansion, of roast beef and plum pudding to all the chimney-sweepers of the metropolis.’ We may surely read the verbiage of the text in the spirit in which we study that remarkable work ‘English as She is Spoke,’ and put off for the moment our judicial robes. Three volumes of such magniloquence are, it is true, a rather large allowance; but, as they are mixed with a good deal of lively writing of the old kind, they are really—in a slightly equivocal sense—worth the reading.

It is certainly rather melancholy that the author of ‘Evelina’ should be said to be the author of such twaddle as fills many pages of the Memoirs. But we can now see clearly enough the ominous signs which might have revealed themselves to a judicious adviser. The charm of ‘Evelina’ is, in one sense, what Croker took it to be. Readers, indeed, were not delighted with an otherwise inferior book because they supposed it to be written by a girl of seventeen. Such a belief counts for very little in the success of any performance; a novel, otherwise dull, would not be long read even if we knew it to have been written by a child of seven; and, moreover, the book had achieved success before the authorship had ceased to be a secret. It was the youthfulness of the book, not the youthfulness of the author, which constituted the charm. It professed to give the impressions of a ‘young female, educated in the most secluded retirement,’ who ‘makes, at the age of seventeen, her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life.’ The freshness, the *naïveté* and sincerity of the impressions is preserved, though the author was just old enough to give them literary form, and to be capable of interpreting the feelings from the vantage-ground of the next stage in life. She was, like some greater artists, summing up an experience still vivid in recollection, though not actually present. In doing this, she had unconsciously made a great literary discovery. It had been known from an early period that young ladies could be very charming; and that fact had been very generally turned to account by poets,

novelists, and others. But the charming young lady who appears in the novels of the preceding generation is obviously described from without. Amelia and Sophia Western, and even Clarissa Harlowe, though she is supposed to be speaking for herself, are felt to be the creations of the masculine imagination, if such a word can be applied to Richardson; and are at least placed in a world seen from a masculine point of view.

It had not occurred to anyone capable of giving effect to the thought that the world seen through a young woman's eyes and described with thorough frankness and spontaneity could be worth a temporary visit. The feminine writers of plays and novels—of whom, of course, there had been plenty—had tried to imitate the procedure of their male relations. Sarah Fielding had endeavoured to tread in the steps of her big brother; and an earlier race had been disciples in the school of Wycherley and Congreve, and had begun by throwing aside some qualities which we generally associate with feminine excellence. But in 'Evelina' we have for the first time the genuine young woman coming forwards and claiming a hearing on her own merits. She is not going to affect a kind of knowledge which she cannot possess except at second-hand or at the price of losing her distinctive excellence. She admits herself to be perfectly simple-minded, no scholar or philosopher, deficient of all that knowledge of human nature which Tom Jones and his like had acquired in rough contact with the uglier facts of life, and yet she presumes to think that her little impressions may have an interest of their own. Many later writers have appropriated this discovery; we have been told with such fulness and minuteness what are the views of young ladies about things in general, from the earliest period at which they issue from their nurseries, that we scarcely do justice to Miss Burney as the first to make what was then a daring experiment. Ladies who wished to put forwards the claims of their sex to some equality of intellect, when they did not belong to the genus adventuress, took ponderous airs of learning. They translated Epictetus, or wrote essays upon Shakspeare after the manner of the great lexicographer; and obtained that kind of admiration which Johnson described too accurately by the parallel of the 'dancing dogs'—a wonder, not that they could do it well, but that they could do it at all. Under the conditions of the time even such wonder was perhaps legitimate and worth accepting. But Miss Burney had gallantly come forwards to show that there was



one thing, at least, which women could not only do, but do incomparably better than men—namely, express their own sentiments and draw their own portraits.

It seems, indeed, that Miss Burney, much as she had been kept in the background, must have seen a good deal more of the world than most young women of her position. Her father's profession was socially ambiguous; as a music-master he belonged to a class not very highly esteemed by our ancestors, and scarcely regarded as respectable by the solid, prosperous tradesmen against whom she levels a good deal of satire in 'Evelina'; as a music-master of an unusual kind, he was at the same time welcomed and petted by all the connoisseurs and patrons of the fine arts. 'Evelina' is devised so as to make the young lady alternate between the grand society of Lord Orville and the coarse tradesmen who kept shops and took in lodgers. We may doubtless trace some reflections of Miss Burney's personal experiences in this matter. In her Memoirs she dwells chiefly upon the noble patrons who admitted her father to their houses; but she had had more than glimpses of their social inferiors; and her father's best anecdote about her describes her as playing with the daughters of his next-door neighbour, a wig-maker, and spoiling one of his wigs by immersion in a water-tub. Clearly she had originals for those portraits of the Branghton circle, which so much delighted the critics of Streatham; and, without putting her down as a full-blown snob, we must say that she had a very strong conviction that the loftier natures were generally to be found in aristocratic circles. The tradesmen and their friends who figure in her pages are treated with merciless ridicule, and she plainly prefers even the immoral fine gentleman who has a due knowledge of the ways of good society.

With that, however, we need not trouble ourselves. Her critics were agreed—and it is idle to argue so superfluous a point—that she does not describe individuals after the fashion of the immortal Shakspeare and others, but abstract types, mere general likenesses of the mean tradesman, the perfect gentleman, the proud aristocrat, the reckless prodigal, and so forth. Each character is an embodiment of some 'humour'—in the Ben Jonson sense—and never comes upon the stage except to illustrate his peculiar weakness in every speech he utters. We are, in fact, properly speaking, in the reign of light comedy; we must not ask for profound insight or for delicate observation; a brilliant, boldly-

sketched portrait of some tolerably obvious type is all that we can fairly demand ; and such portraits are abundant and lively enough to explain the general impression of her friends, sanctioned by Sheridan and Murphy, that her natural talents would come out in writing for the stage. Perhaps the point which strikes us most in this series of social sketches is rather different from what the ordinary criticisms seem to imply. Thackeray, in one of the 'Roundabout Papers' (the 'Peal of Bells'), quotes a passage from 'Evelina,' in which Lord Orville makes an offer to the heroine, and contrasts this 'old perfumed, powdered d'Arblay conversation' with a bit of modern slang. Undoubtedly, when Miss Burney wanted to describe a Grandison of her own, she put into his mouth the courtly compliment which might still go with laced coats and diamond buckles. But it is curious to observe what one must almost call the blackguardly behaviour of the fine gentlemen as a class. Evelina goes about with the vulgar relations with whom she is doomed to associate to the various amusements of the day. They visit the opera as a strange region set apart for a loftier order of beings ; and are grossly inattentive to music which Dr. Burney's daughter could of course appreciate. But they seem to be quite at home when visiting Vauxhall and Ranelagh and 'Marylebone Gardens,' and 'the long room at Hampstead,' where the middle classes appear to have enjoyed themselves very heartily with dances and fireworks and other entertainments. In such places she meets with the fine young gentlemen who succeeded to the Lovelaces of a previous period, and preceded the bucks and dandies of the Tom and Jerry period. Evelina is always getting separated from her party, falling into the most questionable company, receiving the rudest attentions from these young men of fashion, and being rescued by the chivalrous Lord Orville, who, however, seems to be more shocked than surprised. At her first ball, Sir Clement Willoughby, who is supposed to be a gentleman and a man of fashion, persecutes her to dance—never having been introduced to her—with a continuous impertinence almost inconceivable in what is meant for decent society, yet most insufficiently resented. She welcomes him afterwards as a pleasant contrast to the coarse manners of her friends ; he takes part in a brutal practical joke upon her grandmother in order to ingratiate himself with one of her guardians ; he tries to persuade her to elope with him out of hand in his carriage on the return from Vauxhall ; forges an insulting letter to her from Lord Orville ; and, though

he is meant to be wicked, he does not apparently cease to be regarded as a finished gentleman. Two of his friends show their good taste by getting up a race between two decrepit old women of eighty; all the ladies attend to see the event decided; and Lord Orville shows unparalleled humanity by picking up one of the poor old creatures who has fallen, in spite of the protests from the backer of her competitor. It must be said that, if this be a fair picture of the men of fashion of the day, the impressions of a girl of seventeen, brought up in the strictest seclusion, upon her first entrance into the world must occasionally have been startling.

Readers of Horace Walpole or George Selwyn will certainly not be inclined to doubt that courtliness of manner, such as Chesterfield would have approved, might be a mere varnish over coarseness and profligacy. In her portraits of this kind, however, we suspect that Miss Burney was eking out the limited experience of a young lady by secondhand characters. Grandison and Lovelace were the models from whom she was drawing rather than any of the gentlemen who visited Dr. Burney's musical parties. The discovery which she had made was not fully realised even by herself. It is pleasant to enter a young lady's world, but we must add the condition that it should be the world which a young lady can really understand. 'Evelina' implies at most a partial recognition of this condition. Miss Austen's instinctive tact made her confine herself strictly to the little incidents of domestic history, which the young lady not only understands, but understands better than anyone. The men who enter her stories show only those aspects which are visible to their sisters. We never see them except at a tea-table or taking a lady for a drive in their curricles. Miss Burney is not quite so discreet. She does not, indeed, venture to accompany her masculine characters into regions beyond the female view; but she takes her heroines into scenes where the fine gentleman disports himself with considerable freedom; and we feel that the heroine is giving her impressions of men and things not really intelligible to her, and is forced to supplement them by drawing upon the common stock of previous novelists.

Her men are apt to be even more conventional than the ordinary male cousins of a feminine imagination. This, indeed, does not seriously injure the general effect of 'Evelina.' The portraits of the vulgar Branghtons and their circle seem to have been generally regarded as the most successful parts of the book; and

these we can admire without stint. Taking them as they are meant, for bright telling social caricatures, and not asking for the delicacy or insight of a higher art, we must admit that they are dashed off with admirable vivacity, and that we see for the first time the keen little feminine satirist with a charming quickness of perception for the foibles of her 'social environment.' This is the really new element in our literature : the discovery of a vein of ridicule not worked by any of her predecessors. The rapid glancing intuitions of the feminine observer are now being for the first time turned to account to give a brilliant picture of one aspect of human nature. Before her time, talent of a similar kind must have been wasted in the kind of feminine gossip which was treated with supercilious good-nature by writers in the 'Spectator.' Miss Burney discovered that it had a value of its own, and could be embodied in literary form.

Unluckily she mistook her own gifts. Admiration of her novel took its usual form. People talked about her insight into the human heart, her extraordinary capacity for penetrating or representing character, and so forth. It is no wonder that Miss Burney took herself too seriously, and mistook her admirable facility for rapid sketching for a power of grand historical painting. When a judicious admirer of Miss Austen's suggested to her that she should write a romance illustrative of the history of the House of Brunswick, Miss Austen received the suggestion in a manner worthy of her good sense. One cannot help fancying that Miss Burney would have caught at the proposal ; unless, indeed, she had felt herself to be rather too familiar with some members of that noble family. The weakest part of 'Evelina' is a bit of melodrama with a romantic Scotchman, saved from suicide by the expostulations of the heroine, who turns out to be somebody else, whilst she herself has been more or less changed at nurse. It does not appear that anybody had the kindness to tell her that this part of the story, fortunately not one which occupies much space, was rubbish, or that the elderly benevolent parson who does the heavy moralising was an old bore. She probably fancied, like most young authors, that she was at her best when most pretentiously solemn and didactic. In her next story, 'Cecilia,' she according takes the airs of a solemn moralist, which do not sit upon her quite so easily as might be wished. She desires to be not merely the lively describer, but the judicious Mentor of society, worthy to be ranked with those distinguished females, Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Carter, and Mrs. Chapone,

and, drawing her sentiments and, to some degree, her style of writing from that repertory of eighteenth-century wisdom, the 'Rambler,' which, indeed, deserves more respect than it always received for its own merits, but which, as diluted through the brain of a clever young lady, anxious to be a good deal wiser and more solemn than nature permits, becomes decidedly tedious when it escapes being unintentionally comic. 'Cecilia,' indeed, is by no means entirely ruined by the infusion of the superlatively sententious. Miss Burney had learnt a good deal in the Streatham society during the period of composition; and, so long as she is discharging her natural function, her perception shows no signs of falling off.

The story, though of the elaborate and conventional kind intended to give effect to a particular moral application, has at least been thought out, and is developed with a good deal of spirit, though with a rather superfluous effusion of fine sentiment. Though 'Evelina' appears to us to be greatly superior, in proportion as it is more spontaneous, we can believe that the readers of 'Cecilia' might still enjoy the old qualities and take the ominous increase of pomposity as implying merely the riper reflectiveness of later life. The worst symptom is, however, that Miss Burney evidently relishes her most stilted performances best, and brings in the more comic scenes, in which she condescends to be amusing, with an air of apology. The critical part of the story, which is reached in the fourth volume, is sufficiently characteristic. Cecilia loves Mortimer Delville, and Mortimer Delville loves Cecilia Beverley. He is the son of a proud Delville, or rather of a Delville who is nothing but pride, and whose fortunes are ruined. Cecilia has 3,000*l.* a year and all the virtues. Why should they not marry? Because Mortimer would have either to take the name of Beverley or to abandon Miss Beverley's fortune. The young pair, to do them justice, are willing that he should call himself Beverley instead of Mortimer; but the stern parents, Mr. Delville and his obedient wife, decline to permit such a sacrifice. Mrs. Delville, the mother, calls upon Cecilia to explain the wickedness of gratifying her love at the expense of Delville's family. She takes the highest possible moral tone. 'To your family, I assure you, whatever may be the pride of your own, *you* being its offspring, we would not object. With your merit we are all well acquainted, your character has our highest esteem, and your fortune exceeds our most sanguine desires. Strange at once and

afflicting! Now not all these requisites for the satisfaction of prudence, not all these allurements for the gratification of happiness, can suffice to fulfil or to silence the claims of either! There are other demands to which we must attend, demands which ancestry and blood call upon us aloud to ratify! Such claimants are not to be neglected with impunity; they assert their rights with the authority of prescription; they forbid us alike either to bend to inclination or stoop to interest, and from generation to generation their injuries will call out for redress, should their noble and long unsullied name be consigned to oblivion.'

The admirable Cecilia does not intimate to Mrs. Delville, in the politest way possible, that she is an old fool, but admits the claim expounded in this and a good deal more of similar eloquence, and determines to give up the son. The young gentleman is not quite so reasonable in his remonstrances, causes his mother to break a blood-vessel, and leads to various agonies protracted through a volume and a half before the great problem is happily resolved. 'The whole of this unfortunate business,' as a sage physician sums up the moral of the work, 'has been the result of PRIDE and PREJUDICE;' though, as he adds, 'so wonderfully is good and evil balanced that to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you will also owe the termination' of your miseries. How that happens may be discovered from the book.

It is superfluous to observe that it is not by such twaddle as we have quoted that *Pride and Prejudice* has become a familiar phrase to us, and that it is not through Miss Burney's achievements in the direction of the old-fashioned romance that she has any claim to be a founder of a modern novel. In fact, when we read these stilted declamations, uttered apparently in a *bona fide* conviction that she is presenting a grand moral problem, and observe further that her friends admired her wonderful skill in making Mrs. Delville loveable in spite of her pride, we can understand how Miss Burney fell a victim to the fascinations of the Royal palace. She could ridicule vulgarity with admirable quickness; but when she becomes solemn and didactic, she does not see the difference between humbugs and realities. She gets altogether out of her depth, and gives us the emptiest of lay figures, gesticulating and perorating, instead of any real representation of human passion. There is an old semi-lunatic in 'Cecilia,' who goes about declaiming on the virtues of the poor and the selfishness of the rich, who is evidently in-



tended to be a striking study of half-witted benevolence. Really he strikes one chiefly as an embodiment of that vein of insincere declamation into which Miss Burney afterwards diverged, and which takes such comic proportions in the memoir of her father. First discoverers are apt to misunderstand the nature of their own discovery; and the worst that can be said of Miss Burney is that after hitting upon a really new and excellent literary novelty, she knew so little what she had done that she sank into Madame d'Arblay. A tract which she published in behalf of the emigrant French priests is an amusing example of the same tendency. She evidently thought that, as she had adopted Johnsonese in 'Cecilia,' she might try to rival Burke in declamations upon revolutionary wickedness.

To overlook this weakness would be impossible; and, indeed, it gives the only explanation of the complete failure to sustain her early reputation. Her discovery, however, though she was herself unconscious of its true nature, was to bear fruit in later hands. She generally receives credit as the first writer who made the novel decent. Macaulay compares the reform which she brought about with the reform of the stage at the time of Collier. Without examining the precedent, we must say that there is some truth in this, if decency is to be identified unreservedly with morality. Some books, however, were really moral in a high degree which offend modern notions of decorum, and some books are very distinctly the reverse which pay the most scrupulous respect to our modern regulations. Miss Burney's novels are no doubt inoffensive in this respect, and may possibly be regarded as edifying; but the true inference, as it appears to us, is rather more limited. They were, no doubt, one of the first precedents for that kind of literature which is intended to be read by young ladies, and which can therefore be provided most effectually by young ladies. In the previous generation, Richardson and Fielding and their friends were fond of arguing the question whether young women ought to be allowed to learn Latin, or should find a sufficient outlet for their energies in cooking their husband's dinner and mending his shirts. Ladies who had courage enough to break through the conventional rules acted under protest; and were rather apt to assume a preternatural pomposity by way of a faint apology for their audacity. Their intentions were so very good that they must be pardoned for infringing the ordinary regulations. In our own time we have shaken off so many pre-



judices that the sentiment is scarcely intelligible. Miss Burney's career as an authoress came at the time when the change was beginning. She broke ground in a field afterwards to be cultivated by such a host of successors as showed something of its capabilities. But when she had made her success, she misinterpreted its meaning, and set up as a professor of the fine old vein of didactic sentimentalism. She could not understand the value of her spontaneous and natural perceptions; and thought that, in spite of nature, she must set up as a successor to Richardson, full of moral saws and edifying reflections. Meanwhile, however, she had given an impulse to her successors, which no doubt encouraged Miss Austen and Miss Edgeworth, and through them a whole host of literary descendants. It is clear enough that one result has been the production of a whole literature, which has at least the negative merit of freedom from certain stains which exclude Fielding and even the edifying Richardson from the list of universally readable books. But to judge of it as a whole and pronounce upon its value, either ethically or æsthetically, would be to enter a wide and debatable field of inquiry.

### ON THE DOWNWARD SLOPE.

THERE have been some creditable attempts by ancient writers—who have also been pretty well advanced in years—to beatify old age; but not very much has come of it. Upon the whole, the world has remained so far unconvinced that no one gets old if he can help it; we take these raptures with a little salt, or at all events, if we credit them, are content to wait till in due time we inherit the mature privileges that have been promised to us. There is one thing, too, about which these optimists have been silent—namely, that to a considerable portion of the human race (say nineteen-twentieths) old age offers no immunity from toil, though it is quite unequal to bear it. Leisure and competence, with good health, are taken for granted. This, however, is the weak point of most philosophies, which persist in regarding the human race as persons of culture, reclining in easy chairs, with things handsome about them, and in ignoring such trivial matters as disease and penury—an omission which proves that the sublimest intuition can never supply the want of experience, since the sharpest pang of the soul produced by the contemplation of the Infinities is a mere flea-bite to the spectacle of one's children wanting bread, which, through old age or any other cause, we are unable to procure for them. In such cases, it is true, 'there is always the workhouse;' but even that reflection, such is the unphilosophic character of the ordinary mind, often fails to be consolatory.

Still, to the public I am addressing at all events, there will be in old age, I hope, meat, drink, and clothing, and even (for a reason that it is not necessary to particularise) a spare sixpence, without their being troubled about such matters, so that, in considering this question of growing old, I may, like the philosophers above alluded to, take so much for granted.

It is not necessary for us to be poets to have an impression in youth that we shall never see old age. The reason of this pretty general feeling is, I think, that we are unable to picture such a state of things; it is necessary to grow old oneself in order to understand the transformation that circumstance effects in us. The failing limb and the scanty breath can, it is true, be understood—approximately, for they are not quite the same in

illness—by those who have been invalids. As he reads the noble book of Ecclesiastes, even a young man can understand what sort of day that is with us in which the keepers of the house (the arms) begin to tremble, and the strong men (the legs) to bow themselves, and those that look out of the window (the eyes) to be darkened; how we 'rise up at the voice of the bird,' not, alas! because we hear it more distinctly ('the daughters of music,' so far as we are concerned, are indeed 'brought low'), but because we can sleep no longer as in youth, or perhaps—more pitiful reason still!—because we wish to get the most out of the little daylight that remains to us, before we go to 'the sunless land;' he may comprehend even how the almond tree flourishes (a strange word indeed for the growth of 'sad grey hairs'!), and the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails; but what the young man can *not* understand, and is wholly unable to picture, is the mental depression consequent on all these things, as the curtain gradually falls upon the stage of existence. It does not indeed 'fall,' except in rare instances, but gradually closes in and darkens, fold on fold, just as the coming on of night is represented in a theatre. Even youth sees bad weather occasionally, but the rain is soon 'over and gone;' he knows not what it is to see 'the clouds return *after* the rain;' he cannot conceive the years whereof we say, 'We have no pleasure in them.'

When a man grows old, most pleasures indeed, properly so called, are dead to him; and if, in spite of Nature's warning, he will still pursue them, his experience is the reverse of that of Don Juan, who instead of a spirit found 'her frolic grace Fitz Fulke;' he finds them the mere ghosts of his dead follies. There is nothing, for example, more pitiable than any pretensions to gallantry in an old man; let him adopt the *rôle* of 'heavy father,' 'benevolent uncle,' or whatever best suits his character, but at all events discard that of 'lover' once for all. The only possible ground for his retaining it would be that his doing so affords amusement to his fellow-creatures—at the expense, however, of all who wear grey hairs.

There is another pleasure just as inappropriate, but to which old age is much more inclined—that of money-getting. It has been said of it, as of whist, that it is the only pleasure that lasts. It may be so—for unfortunately I have never been in a position to test it—but certainly, to the looker-on, nothing can be more contemptible than this piling-up heaps of money upon the verge

of the grave. If, as the wit suggested, one could 'begin the next world with it,' then, indeed, such solicitude would be explicable enough. How little would people then 'leave behind them'! How small would be the probate duties! How rare the bequests to missionary enterprise! But since it must all be left, and that so soon, how amazing is the satisfaction derived from its increase! There is an idea among the baser sort of wealthy persons that the more money they can hoard, the more 'respected' they are; but as a matter of fact they are the more detested for it. 'How much have we lived worth?' not 'How much shall we die worth?' is the question. The agreement of his fellow-creatures about Harpax is quite unanimous on that point. A few folks may be disappointed by the posthumous disposition of his property, but everybody is glad when he dies. Even the hope expressed of his going to heaven is a selfish one: 'if Harpax gets there,' men say, 'then it will be all right for everybody; it must be a club from which no amount of black balls can exclude.' On the other hand, under the most favourable circumstances, we feel it would be very unpleasant to meet Harpax again.

On the whole I think we old folks had better give up the idea of taking pleasure altogether; but happiness is not denied us, and in some respects is easier of attainment than when we were young. There are at least no false joys. Unless a man is a born fool, he knows, after fifty, the worthlessness of all pretence. He does not wear tight boots or cultivate the nobility. He is content with his own position, and has learnt that an ounce of comfort is worth a pound of swelldom. He has no more illusions, at all events of the material kind. He knows what he likes, and sticks to it. He has no curiosity about strange sherries. He is quite sure as to whether the sea agrees with him, and that moving after dinner does not. He may not 'know himself' in a philosophical sense, but he is admirably posted up in that subject for all practical purposes. The accuracy of his views in this direction does not necessarily imply selfishness or even egotism; it is merely the fruit of long experience. Of course there are old men who think of nothing but themselves; but if you consult their contemporaries, you will find that the habit began with them some time ago. Selfish or not, old age is certainly inclined to be tender-hearted as regards little children; I don't mean rude, mischievous brats, whom nobody really likes but their mothers, but nice children. I have seen the tenderest friendships existing

between April and November, the overtures for which have always come, of course, from the latter, from the six with the nought to the six without it; and I am inclined to think that children's happiness is shared by old people more than by those less mature. This is not, as some cynic may say, because we ourselves are nearing second childhood; it arises from the far-back recollection of our own youth (itself sufficient to inspire tenderness), and from the reflection, born of the fulness of our years, that it is well for these little ones to gather the roses while they may.

On the other hand, we do not 'go a wooing in our boys' with quite the gusto that has been imputed to us; it reminds us too much of our own vanished pleasures; and besides, it generally ends in our having to make them (what, by the bye, they seldom make for *us*) an allowance.

Next to the young, as the years creep upon ourselves, we love and admire what is old. As a rule, though there are rare exceptions—Victor-Hugo-like old men, who hail every new invention as heaven-born, and behold in every gleam of promise the Sunrise—there are no such true conservatives as we old people. Change is abhorrent to us, even to the finding our slippers on one side of the fireplace instead of the other. We cling to old customs and old manners, to old books, old servants, and old friends. These last fit us like old boots, and are as welcome, and, if lost (for they are never worn out), are as difficult to replace. Never did the great London sage give a wiser piece of advice to us than to make friends with younger men, lest, being suffered by the cruel kindness of fate to survive our contemporaries, we should find ourselves without friends at all. It is advice, however, not easy to follow; for as, for swimming and running, we now find our joints too stiff, so for the exercise of new friendships (which require a certain nimbleness of spirit) our minds are too indolent and torpid. Some of us, indeed, have a certain mental agility, which itself, I have read, is to be deplored. 'There is something,' says a great authority on human nature, 'in the very vivacity of old age which is contemptible.' This is a hard saying, but not altogether undeserved, if, as I imagine, 'the authority' had in his mind that description of old man which may be called Falstaffian. Everyone knows that terrible line—

'The witless Falstaff of a hoary Hal;'

and even though the Hals be not hoary, anything more graceless than such a personage is not to be conceived. He may secure the society of youth by pretending to their vices, and by setting before them what is drawn from the impure wells of his remembrance—all the more dangerous when it sparkles—but never their friendship. Humanity stands aloof from him; at the very best a will-of-the-wisp wandering over a waste of mud, he fails and wanes, and, having done his worst to lead astray, presently goes out in utter darkness, leaving behind him, instead of that gracious memory which is the old man's hope, an evil odour and the seeds of ill.

Old men have far other and better parts to play as regards their juniors, if they will. Some of us have power, some influence, some riches, and all of us, who have not misused our lives, some sympathy with those who need it. To us come the young with their confidences, their aspirations, their requests, that for various reasons cannot be made to those on whom they have nearer claims. The young inventor brings his project, the maiden her tender secret, the bashful poet his lay. At the lowest we can encourage them, and put our experience at their service. If such help as we can render cannot be called a pleasure, it is only because the satisfaction we derive from it is so serene and lofty as to merit a higher name.

I have said that we have no illusions, but of course I did not mean to imply that we have got at the root of things. Our views of life may not be more correct than those of younger men, but such as they are they content us; and they are not liable to change. The same may be said of our views of death. As a rule, the older we grow, the less terrible death appears to us. We have lost so many of those we love, that we have more friends on the other shore than on this side. They have crossed the silent river, and are waiting for us somewhere. Unlike the child so exquisitely described by the Dorsetshire poet—

She wore no black, she wore her white,  
She wore no black, she wore her blue;  
She never mourned another's flight,  
She was herself the first that flew—

we alas, are among the last to fly. To what is vaguely called 'the Believer' this makes an enormous difference in the outlook. But surely to all of us it is something. To die, since these dear folks have all gone through that ordeal before us, cannot be such

a very dreadful thing. I have never believed, as some pious people do, that the devil takes the majority of our friends, just as he used to take all the best tunes ; and, after all, let the parsons say what they will, we have not all been Neros nor even Napoleons.

Nevertheless, we that are old do fear death more than the young, for one thing : it is more dangerous than it was wont to be to those we love best. Every post breathes peril, every telegram speaks of loss. We look around on the few contemporaries who remain, and tremble. When we part from them on a voyage or on a journey, it seems no longer an *au revoir* that we are bidding them, but a good-bye. And the nearest and the dearest, how we cling to them and grudge their being out of our sight !

There is another fear, and a much more terrible one than that of death—namely, that of too long a life. Strangely enough, this terror, which is in the heart of every one of us, has seldom been alluded to by those who have discoursed upon this subject. ‘There is no man so old,’ says an ancient writer, ‘but thinks he may live a year ;’ he might well have added, ‘and hopes he may not do so.’ With every appliance that wealth and even affection can bestow, extreme old age is appalling. Swift, we are told, expired ‘a driver and a show,’ but he had at least once been Swift. The spectators were not all contemptuous mockers ; some surely pitied the wreck of what had held so rich a freight of genius. But to decline from ordinary old age into dotage, as happens to so many of us—a ghastly present without a past !—*that*, indeed, is a thing to fear. Add to this a sense, however dim, of the necessity of working and of our impotence to do so, and what need is there for the most zealous devil-worshipper to imagine a Gehenna ?



## THE GIANT'S ROBE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'VICE VERSA.'

'Now does he feel his title  
Hang loose upon him, like a giant's robe  
Upon a dwarfish thief.'—*Macbeth*.

### CHAPTER XIII.

A 'THORN AND FLOWER PIECE.'



'ILLUSION' had not been very long published before Mark began to have uncomfortable anticipations that it might be on the way to achieve an unexpected success, and he was nearer the truth in this than he himself believed as yet. It might not become popular in the wider and coarser sense of the word, being somewhat over the heads of the large class who read fiction for the 'story;' it might never find its way to railway book-stalls (though even this, as will appear, befell it in time,) or be considered a profitable subject for Transatlantic piracy; but it was

already gaining recognition as a book that people of any culture should, for their own sakes, at least assume to have read and appreciated.

Mark was hailed by many judges of such things as a new and powerful thinker, who had chosen to veil his theories under the garb of romance, and if the theory was dissented from in some quarters, the power and charm of the book were universally admitted. At dinner-parties, and in all circles where literature

is discussed at all, 'Illusion' was becoming a standard topic; friendships were cemented and intimacies dissolved over it; it became a kind of 'shibboleth.'

At first Mark had little opportunity of realising this to the full extent, for he went out seldom if at all. There had been a time in his life—before he had left Cambridge, that is—when he had mixed more in society; his undergraduate friends had been proud to present to their family circle a man with his reputation for general brilliancy, and so his engagements in the vacations had been frequent. But this did not last; from a feeling that his own domestic surroundings would scarcely bear out a vaguely magnificent way he had of alluding to his 'place' and his 'people'—a way which was not so much deliberate imposition as a habit caught from associates richer and higher up in the social scale—from this feeling, he never offered to return any of these hospitalities, and though this was not rigorously expected of him, it did serve to prevent any one of his numerous acquaintanceships from ripening into something more. When the crash came, and it was generally discovered that the reputed brilliant man of his year was a very ordinary failure, Mark found himself speedily forgotten, and in the first soreness of disappointment was not sorry to remain in obscurity for a season.

But now a reaction in his favour was setting in; his publishers were already talking of a second edition of 'Illusion,' and he received, under his name of 'Cyril Ernstone,' countless letters of congratulation and kindly criticism, all so pleasantly and cordially worded, that each successive note made him angrier, the only one that consoled him at all being a communication in a female hand which abused the book and its writer in the most unmeasured terms. For his correspondent's estimate of the work was the one which he had a secret wish to see more prevalent (so long, of course, as it did not interfere with the success of his scheme), and he could almost have written to thank her—by some unfortunate oversight, however, she had forgotten to append her name and address.

The next stage in the career of the book was a discovery on someone's part that the name of its author was an assumed one, and although there are many who would think as little of looking for the name of the man who wrote the play they see or the book they read as they would for that of the locomotive behind which they travel, there are still circles for whom the first two matters at least possess an interest.

And so several set out to run the actual author to earth, well assured that, as is fabled of the fox, he himself would enjoy the sport as much as his pursuers; and it is the fact that Mark might have given them a much longer run had he been anxious to do so, but, though he regretted it afterwards, the fruits of popularity were too desirable to be foregone.

There were some false cries at first. A 'London correspondent' knew for a fact that the book was written by an old lady at a lunatic asylum in her lucid intervals; while a ladies' journal had heard that the author was a common carpenter and entirely self-educated; and there were other similar discoveries. But before they had time to circulate widely, it became somehow common knowledge that the author was a young schoolmaster, and that his real name was Mark Ashburn.

And Mark at once began to reap the benefit. His old friends sought him out once more; men who had passed him in the streets with a careless nod that was almost as bad as a cut direct, or without even the smallest acknowledgment that a time had been when they were inseparables, now found time to stop him and ask if the rumours of his *début* in literature were really true.

By-and-by cards began to line his mantelpiece as in the old days; he went out once more, and met everywhere the kindness and courtesy that the world of London, whatever may be said against it, is never chary of showing towards the most insignificant person who has once had the good fortune to arouse its interest.

Mark liked it all at first, but as he saw the book growing more and more in favour, and the honours paid to himself increasing, he began to be uneasy at his own success.

He would not have objected to the book's securing a moderate degree of attention, so as to prepare the public mind for the blaze of intellect he had in reserve for it—that he had expected, or at least hoped for—but the mischief of this ridiculous enthusiasm which everyone he met seemed to be affecting over this book of Holroyd's was that it made an anticlimax only too possible when his own should see the light.

Mark heard compliments and thanks with much the annoyance a practised *raconteur* must feel with the feeble listener who laughs heartily, while the point of the story he is being told is still in perspective.

And soon he wished heartily that the halo he felt was burning

round his undeserving head could be moderated or put out, like a lamp—it was such an inconvenience. He could never escape from Holroyd's book; people *would* talk to him about it.

Sooner or later, in conversation with the most charming persons, just when he was feeling himself conversationally at his very best, he would see the symptoms he dreaded warning him that the one fatal topic was about to be introduced, which seemed to have the effect of paralysing his brain. He would struggle hard against it, making frantic efforts to turn the subject, and doubling with infinite dexterity; but generally his interlocutor was not to be put off, 'running cunning,' as it were, like a greyhound dead to sporting instincts, and fixing him at once with a 'Now, Mr. Ashburn, you really must allow me to express to you some of the pleasure and instruction I have received from your book,' and so on; and then Mark found himself forced to listen with ghastly smiles of sham gratification to the praises of his rival, as he now felt Holroyd was after all becoming, and had to discuss with the air of a creator this book which he had never cared to understand, and soon came cordially to detest.

If he had been the real author, all this would of course have been delightful to him; it was all so kind and so evidently sincere for the most part, that only a very priggish or cynical person could have affected to undervalue it, and any other, even if he felt it overstrained now and then, would have enjoyed it frankly while it lasted, remembering that, in the nature of things, it could not last very long.

But unfortunately, Mark, as we know, had not written 'Illusion,' which made all the difference. No author could have shrunk more sensitively in his inmost soul than he did from the praise of his fellow-men, and his modesty would have been more generally remarked had he not been wise enough to perceive that modesty, in a man, is a virtue with a dangerous streak of the ridiculous about it.

And so he braced himself to go through with it and play out his part. It would not be for long; soon he would have his own book to be complimented upon and to explain. Meanwhile he worked hard at 'Illusion,' until he came to have a considerable surface acquaintance with it; he knew the names of all the more important characters in it now, and hardly ever mixed them up; he worked out most of the allusions, and made a careful analysis of the plot and pedigrees of some of the families. It was much

harder work than reading law, and quite as distasteful; but then it had to be done if he meant to preserve appearances at all.

His fame had penetrated to St. Peter's, where his fellow-masters treated him with an unaccustomed deference, only partially veiled by mild *badinage* on the part of the younger men, while even the boys were vaguely aware that he had distinguished himself in the outside world, and Mark found his authority much easier to maintain.

'How's that young rascal—what's his name? Langton?—the little scamp who said he called me "Prawn," but not "Shellfish," the impident fellow! How's *he* getting on, hey?' said Mr. Shelford to Mark one day about this time.

Mark replied that the boy had left his form now, but that he heard he was doing very well, and had begun to acquire the graceful art of verse-making. 'Verse-making? ay, ay; is he indeed? You know, Ashburn, I often think it's a good thing there are none of the old Romans alive now. They weren't a humorous nation, taken as a whole; but I fancy some of our prize Latin verses would set the stiffest of 'em sniggering. And we laugh at "Baboo English," as they call it! But you tell Langton from me, when you see him, that if he likes to try his hand at a set of elegiacs on a poor old cat of mine that died the other day, I'll look 'em over if he brings them to me after school some day, and if they're what I consider worthy of the deceased's many virtues, I'll find some way of rewarding him. She was a black Persian and her name was "Jinks," but he'll find it Latinise well as "Jinxia," tell him. And now I think of it,' he added, 'I never congratulated you on the effort of *your* muse. It's not often I read these things now, but I took your book up, and—maybe I'm too candid in telling you so—but it fairly surprised me. I'd no idea you had it in you.'

Mark found it difficult to hit the right expression of countenance at such a compliment, but he did it. 'There are some very fine things in that book, sir,' continued Mr. Shelford, 'some very noble words; remarkable for so young a man as you must be. You have lived, Ashburn, it's easy to see that!'

'Oh, well,' said Mark, 'I—I've knocked about, you know.'

'Ah, and you've knocked something into you, too, which is more to the purpose. I'd like to know now when you found time to construct your theories of life and conduct.'

Mark began to find this embarrassing; he said he had hit upon them at odd times ('*very* odd times' he could not help

remembering), and shifted his ground a little uneasily, but he was held fast by the buttonhole. 'They're remarkably sound and striking, I must say that, and your story is interesting, too. I found myself looking at the end, sir, ha, ha! to see what became of your characters. Ah, I *knew* there was something I wanted to ask you. There's a heading you've got for one of your chapters, a quotation from some Latin author, which I can't place to my satisfaction; I mean that one beginning "*Non terret principes.*"'

'Oh, *that* one?' repeated Mark blankly.

'Yes, it reads to me like later Latin; where did you take it from? One of the Fathers?'

'One of them, I forget which,' said Mark quickly, wishing he had cut the quotations out.

'That *ægritudo*, now, "*ægritudo superveniens*," you know—how do you understand that?'

Mark had never troubled himself to understand it at all, so he stared at his interrogator in rather a lost way.

'I mean, do you take it as of the mind or body (that's what made me fancy it must be later Latin); and then there's the *correxit*?'

Mark admitted that there was the '*correxit*.' 'It's mind,' he said quickly. 'Oh, decidedly the mind, *not* body, and—er—I think that's my bus passing. I'll say good-bye;' and he escaped with a weary conviction that he must devote yet more study to the detested 'Illusion.'

This is only a sample of the petty vexations to which he had exposed himself. He had taken over a business which he did not understand, and naturally found the technicalities troublesome, for though, as has been seen, his own tendencies were literary, he had not soared so high as a philosophical romance, while his scholarship, more brilliant than profound, was not always equal to the 'unseen passages' from out-of-the-way authors with which Holroyd had embellished his chapters.

But a little more care made him feel easier on this score, and then there were many compensations; for one unexpected piece of good fortune, which will be recorded presently, he had mainly to thank his friend's book.

He had met an old acquaintance of his, a certain young Herbert Featherstone, who had, on any previous chance encounter seemed affected by a kind of trance, during which his eyes lost all power of vision, but was now completely recovered, so much so indeed as to greet Mark with a quite unexpected warmth.

Was it true that he had written this new book? What was it's name—'Delusion' or something? Fellows were saying he had; hadn't read it himself; his mother and sister had; said it was a devilish good book, too. Where was he hanging out now? and what was he doing on the 10th? Could he come to a little dance his people had that night? Very well, then, he should have a card.

Mark was slightly inclined to let the other understand that he knew the worth of this resuscitated friendliness, but he refrained. He knew of the Featherstones as wealthy people, with the reputation of giving the pleasantest entertainments in London. He had his way to make in the world, and could not afford, he thought, to neglect these opportunities. So he went to the dance and, as he happened to dance well, enjoyed himself, in spite of the fact that two of his partners had read 'Illusion' and knew him as the author of it. They were both pretty and charming girls, but Mark did not enjoy either of those particular vales. In the course of the evening he had a brief conversation with his hostess, and was fortunate enough to produce a favourable impression. Mrs. Featherstone was literary herself, as a reputedly strong-minded lady who had once written two particularly weak-minded novels, would necessarily be. She liked to have a few rising young literary men in her train, with whom she might discuss subjects loftier than ordinary society cares to grasp; but she was careful at the same time that her daughter should not share too frequently in these intellectual privileges, for Gilda Featherstone was very handsome, and literary men are as impressionable as other people.

Mark called one Saturday afternoon at the Featherstones' house in Grosvenor Place, as he had been expressly invited to do on the occasion of the dance, and found Mrs. Featherstone at home. It was not her regular day, and she received him alone, though Mark heard voices and laughter now and then from behind the hangings which concealed the end room of the long suite.

'And now let us talk about your delightful "Illusion," Mr. Ernstone,' she said graciously. 'Do you know, I felt when I read your book that some of my innermost thoughts, my highest aspirations, had been put into words—and *such* words—for me! It was soul speaking to soul, and you get that in so few novels, you know! What a rapture literary creation is! Don't you feel



that? I am sure, even in my own poor little way—you must know that *I* have scribbled once upon a time—even in my own experience, I know what a state of excitement I got into over my own stories. One's characters get to be actual living companions to one; they act by themselves, and all one has to do is just to sit by and look on, and describe.

This seemed to Mark to prove a vividness of imagination on Mrs. Featherstone's part to which her literary productions had not, so far as he knew, done full credit. But he was equal to the occasion.

'Your characters, Mrs. Featherstone, are companions to many more than their creator. I must confess that I, for one, fell hopelessly in love with your Gwendoline Vane, in "Mammon and Moonshine." Mark had once read a slashing review of a flabby little novel with a wooden heroine of that name, and turned it to good account now, after his fashion.

'Now, how nice of you to say that,' she said, highly pleased. 'I am very fond of Gwendoline myself—my ideal, you know. I won't quote that about "praise from Sir Hubert," because it's so very trite, but I feel it. But do you *really* like Gwendoline better than my Magdalen Harwood, in "Strawberries and Cream."

Here Mark got into deep water once more; but he was no mean conversational swimmer, and reached dry land without any unseemly floundering.

'It has been suggested to me, do you know,' she said, when her own works had been at last disposed of, 'that your "Illusion" would make such an admirable play; the central motive really so dramatic. Of course one would have to leave the philosophy out, and all the beautiful reflections, but the story would be left. Have you ever thought of dramatising it yourself, Mr. Ashburn?'

Mark had not. 'Ah, well,' she said, 'if ever I have time again to give to literature, I shall ask your permission to let me see what *I* can do with it. I have written some little charades for drawing-room theatricals, you know, so I am not *quite* without experience.'

Mark, wondering inwardly how Holroyd would relish this proposal if he were alive, said that he was sure the story would gain by her treatment; and presently she proposed that they should go to the further room and see 'how the young people were getting on,' which Mark received with an immense relief, and followed her through the *portière* to the inner room, in which,

as will be seen, an unexpected stroke of good fortune was to befall him.

They found the young people, with a married sister of Mrs. Featherstone, sitting round a small table on which was a heap of *cartes-de-visite*, as they used to be called for no very obvious reason.

Gilda Featherstone, a lively brunette, with the manner of a young lady accustomed to her own way, looked up from the table to welcome Mark. 'You've caught us all at a very frivolous game, Mr. Ashburn. I hope you won't be shocked. We've all had our feelings outraged at least once, so we're going to stop now, while we're still on speaking terms.'

'But what is it?' said Mrs. Featherstone. 'It isn't cards, Gilda dearest, is it?'

'No, mother, not quite; very nearly though. Mr. Caffyn showed it us; *he* calls it "photo-nap."'

'Let me explain, Mrs. Featherstone,' said Caffyn, who liked to drop in at Grosvenor Place occasionally, where he was on terms of some intimacy. 'I don't know if you're acquainted with the game of "nap"?' Mrs. Featherstone shook her head, not too amiably, for she had been growing alarmed of late by a habit her daughter had acquired of mentioning or quoting this versatile young man whom her husband persisted so blindly in encouraging. 'Ah!' said Caffyn, unabashed. 'Well, anyway, this is modelled on it. We take out a selection of photographs, the oldest preferred, shuffle them, and deal round five photographs to each player, and the ugliest card in each round takes the trick.'

'I call it a most ill-natured game,' said the aunt, who had seen an old and unrecognised portrait of herself and the likenesses of several of her husband's family (a plain one) voted the master-cards.

'Oh, so much *must* be said for it,' said Caffyn; 'it isn't a game to be played everywhere, of course; but it gives great scope for the emotions. Think of the pleasure of gaining a trick with the portrait of your dearest friend, and then it's such a capital way of ascertaining your own and others' precise positions in the beauty scale, and all the plain people acquire quite a new value as picture-cards.'

He had played his own very cautiously, having found his amusement in watching the various revelations of pique and vanity amongst the others, and so could speak with security.

'My brothers *all* took tricks,' said one young lady, who had inherited her mother's delicate beauty, while the rest of the family resembled a singularly unhandsome father—which enabled her to speak without very deep resentment.

'So did poor dear papa,' said Gilda, 'but that was the one taken in fancy dress, and he *would* go as *Dante*.'

'Nothing could stand against Gurgoyle,' observed Caffyn. 'He was a sure ace every time. He'll be glad to know he was such a success. You must tell him, Miss Featherstone.'

'Now I won't have poor Mr. Gurgoyle made fun of,' said Mrs. Featherstone, but with a considerable return of amiability. 'People always tell me that with all his plainness he's the most amusing young man in town, though I confess I never could see any signs of it myself.'

The fact was that an unlucky epigram by the Mr. Gurgoyle in question at Mrs. Featherstone's expense, which of course had found its way to her, had produced a coolness on her part, as Caffyn was perfectly well aware.

'"*Ars est celare artem*," as Mr. Bancroft remarks at the Haymarket,' he said lightly. 'Gurgoyle is one of those people who is always put down as witty till he has the indiscretion to try. *Then* they put him down some other way.'

'But why is he considered witty then, if he isn't?' asked Gilda Featherstone.

'I don't know. I suppose because we like to think Nature makes these compensations sometimes, but Gurgoyle must have put her out of temper at the very beginning. She's done nothing in that way for *him*.'

Mrs. Featherstone, although aware that the verdict on the absent Gurgoyle was far from being a just one, was not altogether above being pleased by it, and showed it by a manner many degrees more thawed than that she had originally prescribed to herself in dealing with this very ineligible young actor.

'Mr. Ashburn,' said Miss Featherstone, after one or two glances in the direction of Caffyn, who was absorbed in following up the advantage he had gained with her mother, 'will you come and help me to put these photos back? There are lots of Bertie's Cambridge friends here, and you can tell me who those I don't know are.'

So Mark followed her to a side table, and then came the stroke of good fortune which has been spoken of; for, as he was replacing

the likenesses in the albums in the order they were given to him, he was given one at the sight of which he could not avoid a slight start. It was a *vignette*, very delicately and artistically executed, of a girl's head, and as he looked, hardly daring to believe in such a coincidence, he was almost certain that the pure brow, with the tendrils of soft hair curling above it,



the deep clear eyes, and the mouth which for all its sweetness had the possibility of disdain in its curves, were those of no other than the girl he had met months ago, and had almost resigned himself never to meet again.

His voice trembled a little with excitement as he said, 'May I ask the name of this lady?'

'That is Mabel Langton. I think she's perfectly lovely; don't you? She was to have been at our dance the other night, and then you would have seen her. But she couldn't come at the last moment.'

'I think I have met Miss Langton,' said Mark, beginning to see now all that he had gained by learning this simple surname. 'Hasn't she a little sister called Dorothy?'

'Dolly? Oh yes. Sweetly pretty child, but terribly spoilt. I think she will put dear Mabel quite in the shade by the time she comes out; her features are so much more regular. Yes; I see you know *our* Mabel Langton. And now, *do* tell me, Mr. Ashburn, because of course you can read people's characters so clearly, you know, what do *you* think of Mabel, really and truly?'

Miss Featherstone was fond of getting her views on the characters of her friends revised and corrected for her by competent male opinion, but it was sometimes embarrassing to be appealed to in this way, while only a very unsophisticated person would permit himself to be entirely candid, either in praise or detraction.

'Well, really,' said Mark, 'you see, I have only met her once in my life.'

'Oh, but that is quite enough for *you*, Mr. Ashburn! And Mabel Langton is always such a puzzle to me. I never can quite make up my mind if she is really as sweet as she seems. Sometimes I fancy I have noticed—and yet I can't be sure—I've heard people say that she's just the least bit, not exactly conceited, perhaps, but too inclined to trust her own opinion about things, and snub people who won't agree with her. But she isn't, is she? I always say that is *quite* a wrong idea about her. Still perhaps—Oh, wouldn't you like to know Mr. Caffyn? He is very clever and amusing, you know, and has just gone on the stage. "Mr. Delamere" he calls himself. But he's not as good there as we all thought he would be. He's coming this way now.' Here Caffyn strolled leisurely towards them, and the introduction was made. 'Of course you have heard of Mr. Ashburn's great book, "Illusion"?' Gilda Featherstone said, as she mentioned Mark's name.

'Heard of nothing else lately,' said Caffyn. 'After which—I am ashamed to have to own I haven't read it, but it's the disgraceful truth.'

Mark felt the danger of being betrayed by a speech like this into saying something too hideously fatuous, over the memory of

which he would grow hot with shame in the night-watches, so he contented himself with an indulgent smile, perhaps, in default of some impossible combination of wit and modesty, his best available resource.

Besides, the new acquaintance made him strangely uneasy; he felt warned to avoid him by one of those odd instincts which (although we scarcely ever obey them) are surely given us for our protection; he could not meet the cold light eyes which seemed to search him through and through.

'Mr. Ashburn and I were just discussing somebody's character,' said Miss Featherstone, by way of ending an awkward pause.

'Poor somebody!' drawled Caffyn, with an easy impertinence which he had induced many girls, and Gilda amongst them, to tolerate, if not admire.

'You need not pity her,' said Gilda indignantly; 'we were *defending* her.'

'Ah!' said Caffyn, 'from one another?'

'No, we were not; and if you are going to be cynical, and satirical, and all that, you can go away. Well, sit down, then, and behave yourself. What, must you go, Mr. Ashburn? Good-bye, then. Mr. Caffyn, I want you to tell me what you *really* think about——'

Mark heard no more than this; he was glad to escape, to get away from Caffyn's scrutiny. 'He looked as if he knew I was a humbug!' he thought afterwards; and also to think at his leisure over this new discovery, and all it meant for him.

He knew her name now; he saw a prospect of meeting her at some time or other in the house he had just left; but perhaps he might not have even to wait for that.

This little girl, whose childish letter he had tossed aside a few days since in his blindness, who else could she be but the owner of the dog after which he had clambered up the railway slope? And he had actually been about to neglect her appeal!

Well, he would write now. Who could say what might not come of it? At all events *she* would read his letter.

That letter gave Mark an infinite deal of trouble. After attentively reading the little story to which it referred, he sat down to write, and tore up sheet after sheet in disgust, for he had never given much study to the childish understanding, with its unexpected deeps and shallows, and found the task of writing down to it go much against the grain. But the desire of satisfying a more

fastidious critic than Dolly gave him at last a kind of inspiration, and the letter he did send, with some misgiving, could hardly have been better written for the particular purpose.

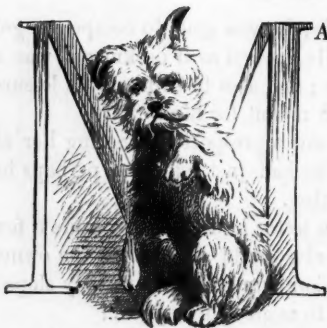
He was pleasantly reassured as to this a day or two later by another little note from Dolly, asking him to come to tea at Kensington Park Gardens on any afternoon except Monday or Thursday, and adding (evidently by external suggestion) that her mother and sister would be pleased to make his acquaintance.

Mark read this with a thrill of eager joy. What he had longed for had come to pass, then; he was to see her, speak with her, once more. At least he was indebted to 'Illusion' for this result, which a few months since seemed of all things the most unlikely. This time, perhaps, she would not leave him without a word or sign, as when last they met; he might be allowed to come again; even in time to know her intimately.

And he welcomed this first piece of good fortune as a happy omen for the future.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE SPRING.



MARK lost no time in obeying Dolly's summons, and it was with an exhilaration a little tempered by a nervousness to which he was not usually subject, that he leaped into the dipping and lurching hansom that was to carry him to Kensington Park Gardens.

As Mark drove through the Park across the Serpentine, and saw the black branches of the trees looking as if they had all been sprinkled with a feathery green powder, and noticed the new delicacy in the bright-hued grass, he hailed these signs as fresh confirmation of the approach of summer—a summer that might prove a golden one for him.

But as he drew nearer Notting Hill, his spirits sank again. What if this opportunity were to collapse as hopelessly as the



first? Mabel would of course have forgotten him—would she let him drop indifferently as before? He felt far from hopeful as he rang the bell.

He asked for Miss Dorothy Langton, giving his name as 'Mr. Ernstone,' and was shown into a little room filled with the



pretty contrivances which the modern young lady collects around her. He found Dolly there alone, in a very stately and self-possessed mood.

'You can bring up tea here, Champion,' she said, 'and some tea-cake—you like tea-cake of course?' she said to Mark, with something of afterthought. 'Mother and Mabel are out,

calling or something,' she added, 'so we shall be quite alone. And now sit down there in that chair and tell me everything you know about fairies.'

Mark's heart sank—this was not at all what he had hoped for; but Dolly had thrown herself back in her own chair, with such evident expectation, and a persuasion that she had got hold of an authority on fairy-lore, that he did not dare to expostulate—although in truth his acquaintance with the subject was decidedly limited.

'You can begin now,' said Dolly calmly, as Mark stared blankly into his hat.

'Well,' he said, 'what do you want to know about them?'

'*All* about them,' said Dolly, with the air of a little person accustomed to instant obedience; Mark's letter had not quite dispelled her doubts, and she wanted to be quite certain that such cases as that of the sugar prince were by no means common.

'Well,' said Mark again, clearing his throat, 'they dance round in rings, you know, and live inside flowers, and play tricks with people—that is,' he added, with a sort of idea that he must not encourage superstition, 'they did once—of course there are no such things now.'

'Then how was it that that little girl you knew—who was not me—ate one up?'

'He was the last one,' said Mark.

'But how did he get turned into sugar? Had he done anything wrong?'

'That's how it was.'

'What was it—he hadn't told a story, had he?'

'It's exactly what he *had* done,' said Mark, accepting this solution gratefully; 'an *awful* story!'

'What was the story?' Dolly demanded at this, and Mark floundered on, beginning to consider Dolly, for all her pretty looks and ways, a decided little nuisance.

'He—he said the Queen of the Fairies squinted,' he stammered in his extremity.

'Then it was she who turned him into sugar?'

'Of course it was,' said Mark.

'But you said he was the last fairy left!' persisted the terrible Dolly.

'Did I?' said Mark miserably; 'I meant the last but one—she was the *other*.'

'Then who was there to tell the story to?' Dolly cross-examined, and Mark quailed, feeling that any more explanation would probably land him in worse difficulties.

'I don't think you know very much about it, after all,' she said with severity. 'I suppose you put all you knew into the story. But you're quite sure there was no fairy inside the figure I ate, aren't you?'

'Oh yes,' said Mark, 'I—I happen to know that.'

'That's all right, then,' said Dolly, with a little sigh of relief. 'Was that the only fairy story you know?'

'Yes,' Mark hastened to explain, in deadly fear lest he might be called upon for another.

'Oh,' said Dolly, 'then we'd better have tea'—for the door had opened.

'It's not Champion after all,' she cried; 'it's Mabel. I never heard you come back, Mabel.'

And Mark turned to realise his dearest hopes and find himself face to face once more with Mabel.

She came in, looking even lovelier, he thought, in her fresh spring toilette than in the winter furs she had worn when he had seen her last, bent down to kiss Dolly, and then glanced at him with the light of recognition coming into her grey eyes.

'This is Mr. Ernstone, Mab,' said Dolly.

The pink in Mabel's cheeks deepened slightly; the author of the book which had stirred her so unusually was the young man who had not thought it worth his while to see any more of them. Probably had he known who had written to him, he would not have been there now, and this gave a certain distance to her manner as she spoke.

'We have met before, Mr. Ernstone,' she said, giving him her ungloved hand. 'Very likely you have forgotten when and how, but I am sure Dolly had not, had you, Dolly?'

But Dolly had, having been too much engrossed with her dog on the day of the breakdown to notice appearances, even of his preserver, very particularly. 'When did I see him before, Mabel?' she whispered.

'Oh, Dolly, ungrateful child! don't you remember who brought Frisk out of the train for you that day in the fog?' But Dolly hung her head and drooped her long lashes, twining her fingers with one of those sudden attacks of awkwardness that sometimes seize the most self-possessed children. 'You never

thanked him then, you know,' continued Mabel; 'aren't you going to say a word to him now?'

'Thank you very much for saving my dog,' murmured Dolly, very quickly and without looking at him; when Mabel, seeing that she was not at her ease, suggested that she should run and fetch Frisk to return thanks in person, which Dolly accepted gladly as permission to escape.

Mark had risen, of course, at Mabel's entrance, and was standing at one corner of the curtained mantelpiece; Mabel was at the other, absently smoothing the fringe with the delicate curves of her hand and with her eyes bent on the rug at her feet. Both were silent for a few moments. Mark had felt the coldness in her manner. 'She remembers how shabbily she treated me,' he thought, 'and she's too proud to show it.'

'You must forgive Dolly,' said Mabel at last, thinking that if Mark meant to be stiff and disagreeable, there was no need at least for the interview to be made ridiculous. 'Children have short memories—for faces only, I hope, not kindnesses. But if you had cared to be thanked we should have seen you before.'

'Rather cool that,' Mark thought. 'I am only surprised,' he said, 'that *you* should remember it; you gave me more thanks than I deserved at the time. Still, as I had no opportunity of learning your name or where you lived—if you recollect we parted very suddenly, and you gave me no permission——'

'But I sent a line to you by the guard,' she said; 'I gave you our address and asked you to call and see my mother, and let Dolly thank you properly.'

She was not proud and ungracious after all, then. He felt a great joy at the thought, and shame, too, for having so misjudged her. 'If I had ever received it,' he said, 'I hope you will believe that you would have seen me before this; but I asked for news of you from that burly old impostor of a guard, and he—he gave me no intelligible message '(Mark remembered suddenly the official's extempore effort), 'and certainly nothing in writing.'

Mark's words were evidently sincere, and as she heard them, the coldness and constraint died out of Mabel's face, the slight misunderstanding between them was over.

'After all, you are here, in spite of guards,' she said, with a gay little laugh. 'And now we have even more to be grateful to you for.' And then, simply and frankly, she told him of the pleasure 'Illusion' had given her, while, at her gracious words, Mark

felt almost for the first time the full meanness of his fraud, and wished, as he had certainly never wished before, that he had indeed written the book.

But this only made him shrink from the subject; he acknowledged what she said in a few formal words, and attempted to turn the conversation, more abruptly than he had done for some time on such occasions. Mabel was of opinion, and with perfect justice, that even genius itself would scarcely be warranted in treating her approval in this summary fashion, and felt slightly inclined to resent it, even while excusing it to herself as the unintentional *gaucherie* of an over-modest man.

'I ought to have remembered perhaps,' she said, with a touch of pique in her voice, 'that you must long ago have tired of hearing such things.'

He had indeed, but he saw that his brusqueness had annoyed her, and hastened to explain. 'You must not think that is so,' he said, very earnestly; 'only, there is praise one cannot trust oneself to listen to long——'

'And it really makes you uncomfortable to be talked to about "Illusion"?' said Mabel.

'I will be quite frank, Miss Langton,' said Mark (and he really felt that he must for his own peace of mind convince her of this); '*really* it does. Because, you see, I feel all the time—I hope, that is—that I can do much better work in the future.'

'And we have all been admiring in the wrong place? I see,' said Mabel, with apparent innocence, but a rather dangerous gleam in her eyes.

'Oh, I know it sounds conceited,' said Mark, 'but the real truth is, that when I hear such kind things said about a work which—which gave me so very little trouble to produce, it makes me a little uncomfortable sometimes, because (you know how perversely things happen sometimes), because I can't help a sort of fear that my next book, to which I really am giving serious labour, may be utterly unnoticed, or—or worse!'

There was no possibility of mistaking this for mock-modesty, and though Mabel thought such sensitiveness rather overstrained, she liked him for it notwithstanding.

'I think you need not fear that,' she said; 'but you shall not be made uncomfortable any more. And you are writing another book? May I ask you about that, or is that another indiscretion?'

Mark was only too delighted to be able to talk about a book which he really *had* written; it was at least a change; and he plunged into the subject with much zest. 'It deals with things and men,' he concluded, 'on rather a larger scale than "Illusion" has done. I have tried to keep it clear of all commonplace characters.'

'But then it will not be quite so lifelike, will it?' suggested Mabel; 'and in "Illusion" you made even commonplace characters interesting.'

'That is very well,' he said, a little impatiently, 'for a book which does not aim at the first rank. It is easy enough to register exactly what happens around one. Anybody who keeps a diary can do that. The highest fiction should idealise.'

'I'm afraid I prefer the other fiction, then,' said Mabel. 'I like to sympathise with the characters, and you can't sympathise with an ideal hero and heroine. I hope you will let your heroine have one or two little weaknesses, Mr. Ernstone.'

'Now you are laughing at me,' said Mark, more humbly. 'I must leave you to judge between the two books, and if I can only win your approval, Miss Langton, I shall prize it more than I dare to say.'

'If it is at all like "Illusion——" Oh, I forgot,' Mabel broke off suddenly. 'That is forbidden ground, isn't it? And now, will you come into the drawing-room and be introduced to mamma? We shall find some tea there.'

Mrs. Langton was a little sleepy after a long afternoon of card-leaving and call-paying, but she was sufficiently awake to be gracious when she had quite understood who Mark was.

'So very kind of you to write to my little daughter about such nonsense,' she said. 'Of course I don't mean that the story itself was anything of the kind, but little girls have such silly fancies—at least mine seem to have. *You* were just the same at Dolly's age, Mabel . . . Now *I* never recollect worrying myself about such ideas . . . I'm sure I don't know how they get it. But I hear it is such a wonderful book you have written, Mr. Ernstone. I've not read it yet. My wretched health, you know. But really, when I think how clever you must be, I feel quite afraid to talk to you. I always consider it must require so *much* cleverness and—and perseverance—you know, to write *any* book.'

'Oh, Mabel, only think,' cried Dolly, now quite herself again, from one of the window-seats, 'Frisk has run away again, and

been out ever since yesterday morning. I forgot that just now. And now Mr. Ernstone can't see him after all !'

And Mabel explained to her mother that they had recognised in the author of 'Illusion' the unknown rescuer of Dolly's dog.

'You mustn't risk such a valuable life as yours is now any more,' said Mrs. Langton, after purring out thanks which were hazily expressed, owing to an imperfect recollection of the circumstances. 'You must be more selfish after this, for other people's sakes.'

'I'm afraid such consideration would not be quite understood,' said Mark, laughing.

'Oh, you must expect to be misunderstood, else there would be no merit in it, would there ? Dolly, my pet, there's something scratching outside the door. Run and see what it is.'

Mark rose and opened the door, and presently a ridiculous little draggled object, as black as a cinder, its long hair caked and clotted with dried mud, shuffled into the room with the evident intention of sneaking into a warm corner without attracting public notice—an intention promptly foiled by the indignant Dolly.

'O-oh !' she cried ; 'it's Frisk. Look at him, everybody—*do* look at him.'

The unhappy animal backed into the corner by the door with his eyes on Dolly's, and made a conscience-stricken attempt to sit up and wave one paw in deprecation, doubtless prepared with a plausible explanation of his singular appearance, which much resembled that of 'Mr. Dolls' returning to Jenny Wren after a long course of 'three-penn'orths.'

'Aren't you ashamed of yourself ?' demanded Dolly. ('Don't laugh, Mr. Ernstone, *please*—it encourages him so.) Oh, I believe you're the very worst dog in Notting Hill.'

The possessor of that bad eminence sat and shivered, as if engaged in a rough calculation of his chances of a whipping ; but Dolly governed him on these occasions chiefly by the moral sanction—an immunity he owed to his condition.

'And this,' said Dolly, scathingly, 'this is the dog you saved from the train, Mr. Ernstone ! There's gratitude ! The next time he shall be left to be killed—he's not worth saving !'

Either the announcement or the suspense, according as one's estimate of his intellectual powers may vary, made the culprit snuffle dolefully, and after Dolly had made a few further uncomplimentary observations on the general vileness of his conduct



and the extreme uncleanliness of his person, which he heard abjectly, he was dismissed with his tail well under him, probably to meditate that if he did not wish to rejoin his race altogether, he really would have to pull up.

Soon after this sounds were heard in the hall, as of a hat being pitched into a corner, and a bag with some heavy objects in it slammed on a table to a whistling accompaniment. 'That's Colin,' said Dolly, confidentially. 'Mother says he ought to be getting more repose of manner, but he hasn't begun yet.'

And soon after Colin himself made his appearance. 'Hullo, Mabel! Hullo, mother! Yes, I've washed my hands and I've brushed my hair. It's *all* right, really. Well, Dolly. What, Mr. Ashburn here!' he broke off, staring a little as he went up to shake hands with Mark.

'I ought to have explained, perhaps,' said Mark. 'Ernstone is only the name I write under. And I had the pleasure of having your son in my form at St. Peter's for some time. Hadn't I, Colin?'

'Yes, sir,' said Colin, shyly, still rather overcome by so unexpected an apparition, and thinking this would be something to tell 'the fellows' next day.

Mabel laughed merrily. 'Mr. Ashburn, I wonder how many more people you will turn out to be!' she said. 'If you knew how afraid I was of you when I used to help Colin with his Latin exercises, and how angry when you found me out in any mistakes! I pictured you as a very awful personage indeed.'

'So I am,' said Mark, 'officially. I'm sure your brother will agree to that.'

'I don't think he will,' said Mabel. 'He was so sorry when they moved him out of your form, that you can't have been so very bad.'

'I liked being in the Middle Third, sir,' said Colin, regaining confidence. 'It was much better fun than old—I mean Mr. Blatherwick's is. I wish I was back again—for *some* things,' he added conscientiously.

When the time came to take his leave, Mrs. Langton asked for his address, with a view to an invitation at no distant time. A young man, already a sort of celebrity, and quite presentable on other accounts, would be useful at dances, while he might serve to leaven some of her husband's slightly heavy professional dinners.

Mabel gave him her hand at parting with an air of entire friendliness and good understanding which she did not usually display on so short a probation. But she liked this Mr. Ashburn

already, who on the last time she had met him had figured as a kind of hero, who was the 'swell' master for whom, without having seen him, she had caught something of Colin's boyish admiration, and who, lastly, had stirred and roused her imagination through the work of his own.

Perhaps, after all, he was a little conceited, but then it was not an offensive conceit, but one born of a confidence in himself which was fairly justified. She had not liked his manner of disparaging his first work, and she rather distrusted his idealising theories; still, she knew that clever people often find it difficult to do justice to their ideas in words. He *might* produce a work which would take rank with the very greatest, and till then she could admire what he had already accomplished.

And besides he was good-looking—very good-looking; his dark eyes had expressed a very evident satisfaction at being there and talking to her—which of course was in his favour; his manner was bright and pleasant; and so Mabel found it agreeable to listen to her mother's praise of their departed visitor.

'A very charming young man, my dear. You've only to look at him to see he's a true genius; and so unaffected and pleasant with it all. Quite an acquisition, really.'

'I found him, mother,' interrupted Dolly; 'he wouldn't have come but for me. But I'm rather disappointed in him myself; he didn't seem to care to talk to *me* much; and I don't believe he knows much about fairies.'

'Don't be ungrateful, Dolly,' said Mabel. 'Who saved Frisk for you?'

'Oh, *he* did; I know all that; but not because he liked Frisk, or me either. It was because—I don't know *why* it was because.'

'Because he is a good young man, I suppose,' said Mrs. Langton instructively.

'No, it wasn't that; he doesn't look so *very* good; not so good as poor Vincent did; more good than Harold, though. But he doesn't care about dogs, and he doesn't care about me, and I don't care about him!' concluded Dolly, rather defiantly.

As for Mark, he left the house thoroughly and helplessly in love. As he walked back to his rooms he found a dreamy pleasure in recalling the different stages of the interview. Mabel's slender figure as she stood opposite him by the mantelpiece, her reserve at first, and the manner in which it had thawed to a frank and gracious interest; the suspicion of a critical but not unkindly

mockery in her eyes and tone at times—it all came back to him with a vividness that rendered him deaf and blind to his actual surroundings. He saw again the group in the dim, violet-scented drawing-room, the handsome languid woman murmuring her pleasant commonplaces, and the pretty child lecturing the prodigal dog, and still felt the warm light touch of Mabel's hand as it had lain in his for an instant at parting.

This time, too, the parting was not without hope; he might look forward to seeing her again after this. A summer of golden dreams and fancies had indeed begun for him from that day, and as he thought again that he owed these high privileges to 'Illusion,' events seemed more than ever to be justifying an act which was fast becoming as remote and unreproachful as acts will, when the dread of discovery—that great awakener of conscience—is sleeping too.

## CHAPTER XV.

### HAROLD CAFFYN MAKES A DISCOVERY.



HAROLD CAFFYN had not found much improvement in his professional prospects since we first made his acquaintance; his disenchantment was in fact becoming complete. He had taken to the stage at first in reliance on the extravagant eulogies of friends, forgetting that the standard for amateurs in any form of art is not a high one, and he was very soon brought to his proper level. A good appearance and complete self-possession were about his sole qualifications, unless we add the voice and manner of a man in good society, which are not by any means the distinctive advantages that they

were a few years ago. The general verdict of his fellow-professionals was, 'Clever enough, but no actor,' and he was without

the sympathy or imagination to identify himself completely with any character and feelings opposed to his own; he had obtained one distinct success, and one only—at a *matinée*, when a new comedy was presented in which a part of some consequence had been entrusted to him. He was cast for a cool and cynical adventurer, with a considerable dash of the villain in him, and played it admirably, winning very favourable notices from the press, although the comedy itself resulted in a dismal fiasco. However, the *matinée* proved for a time of immense service to him in the profession, and even led to his being chosen by his manager to represent the hero of the next production at his own theatre—a poetical drama which had excited great interest before its appearance—and if Caffyn could only have made his mark in it, his position would have been assured from that moment. But the part was one of rather strained sentiment, and he could not, rather than would not, make it effective. In spite of himself, his manner suggested rather than concealed any extravagances in the dialogue, and, worse still, gave the impression that he was himself contemptuously conscious of them; the consequence being that he repelled the sympathies of his audience to a degree that very nearly proved fatal to the play. After that unlucky first night the part was taken from him, and his engagement, which terminated shortly afterwards, was not renewed.

Caffyn was not the man to overcome his deficiencies by hard and patient toil; he had counted upon an easy life with immediate triumphs, and the reality baffled and disheartened him. He might soon have slid into the lounging life of a man about town, with a moderate income, expensive tastes, and no occupation, and from that perhaps even to shady and questionable walks of life. But he had an object still in keeping his head above the social waters, and the object was Mabel Langton.

He had long felt that there was a secret antagonism on her side towards himself, which at first he had found amusement in provoking to an occasional outburst, but was soon piqued into trying to overcome and disarm, and the unexpected difficulty of this had produced in him a state of mind as nearly approaching love as he was capable of.

He longed for the time when his wounded pride would be salved by the consciousness that he had at last obtained the mastery of this wayward nature, when he would be able to pay off the long score of slights and disdains which he had come to

exaggerate morbidly; he was resolved to conquer her sooner or later in defiance of all obstacles, and he had found few natures capable of resisting him long after he had set himself seriously to subdue them.

But Mabel had been long in showing any sign of yielding. For some time after the loss of the 'Mangalore' she had been depressed and silent to a degree which persuaded Caffyn that his old jealousy of Holroyd was well-grounded, and when she recovered her spirits somewhat, while she was willing to listen and laugh or talk to him, there was always the suggestion of an armistice in her manner, and any attempt on his part to lead the conversation to something beyond mere *badinage* was sure to be adroitly parried or severely put down, as her mood varied.

Quite recently, however, there had been a slight change for the better; she had seemed more pleased to see him, and had shown more sympathy and interest in his doings. This was since his one success at the *matinée*, and he told himself triumphantly that she had at last recognised his power; that the long siege was nearly over.

He would have been much less complacent had he known the truth, which was this. At the *matinée* Mabel had certainly been at first surprised almost to admiration by an unexpected display of force on Caffyn's part. But as the piece went on, she could not resist an impression that this was not acting, but rather an unconscious revelation of his secret self; the footlights seemed to be bringing out the hidden character of the man as though it had been written on him in sympathetic ink.

As she leaned back in the corner of the box he had sent them, she began to remember little traits of boyish malice and cruelty. Had they worked out of his nature, as such stains sometimes will, or was this stage adventurer, cold-blooded, unscrupulous, with a vein of diabolical humour in his malevolence, the *real* Harold Caffyn?

And then she had seen the injustice of this and felt almost ashamed of her thoughts, and with the wish to make some sort of reparation, and perhaps the consciousness that she had not given him many opportunities of showing her his better side, her manner towards him had softened appreciably.

Caffyn only saw the effects, and argued favourably. 'Now that fellow Holroyd is happily out of the way,' he thought, 'she doesn't care for anybody in particular. I've only to wait.'

There were considerations other than love or pride which made the marriage a desirable one to him. Mabel's father was a rich man, and Mabel herself was entitled independently to a considerable sum on coming of age. He could hardly do better for himself than by making such a match, even from the pecuniary point of view.

And so he looked about him anxiously for some opening more suitable to his talents than the stage-door, for he was quite aware that at present Mabel's father, whatever Mabel herself might think, would scarcely consider him a desirable *parti*.

Caffyn had been lucky enough to impress a business friend of his with a firm conviction of his talents for business and management, and this had led to a proposal that he should leave the stage and join him, with a prospect of a partnership should the alliance prove a success.

The business was a flourishing one, and the friend a young man who had but recently succeeded to the complete control of it, while Caffyn had succeeded somehow in acquiring a tolerably complete control of *him*. So the prospect was really an attractive one, and he felt that now at last he might consider the worst obstacles to his success with Mabel were disposed of.

He had plenty of leisure time on his hands at present, and thought he would call at Kensington Park Gardens one afternoon, and try the effect of telling Mabel of his new prospects. She had been so sweet and sympathetic of late that it would be strange if she did not express some sort of pleasure, and it would be for him to decide then whether or not his time had come to speak of his hopes.

Mrs. and Miss Langton were out, he was told at the door. 'Miss Dolly was in,' added Champion, to whom Caffyn was well known.

'Then I'll see Miss Dolly,' said Caffyn, thinking that he might be able to pass the time until Mabel's return. 'In the morning-room is she? All right.'

He walked in alone, to find Dolly engaged in tearing off the postage stamp from a letter. 'Hallo, Miss Juggins, what mischief are you up to now?' he began, as he stood in the doorway.

'It's not mischief at all,' said Dolly, hardly deigning to look up from her occupation. 'What have *you* come in for, Harold?'

'For the pleasure of your conversation,' said Caffyn. 'You know you always enjoy a talk with me, Dolly.'

little mouth at this.) 'But what are you doing with those scissors and that envelope, if I'm not indiscreet in asking?'

Dolly was in a subdued and repentant mood just then, for she had been so unlucky as to offend Colin the day before, and he had not yet forgiven her. It had happened in this way. It had been a half-holiday, and Colin had brought home an especial friend of his to spend the afternoon, to be shown his treasures and, in particular, to give his opinion as an expert on the merits of Colin's collection of foreign postage-stamps.

Unhappily for Colin's purpose, however, Dolly had completely enslaved the friend from the outset. Charmed by his sudden interest in the most unboyish topics, she had carried him off to see her doll's house and, in spite of Colin's grumbling dissuasion, the base friend had gone meekly. Worse still, he had remained up there listening to Dolly's personal anecdotes and reminiscences and seeing Frisk put through his performances, until it was too late to do anything like justice to the stamp album, over which Colin had been sulkily fuming below, divided between hospitality and impatience.

Dolly had been perfectly guiltless of the least touch of coquetry in thus monopolising the visitor, for she was not precocious in this respect, and was merely delighted to find a boy who, unlike Colin, would condescend to sympathise with her pursuits; but perhaps the boy himself, a susceptible youth, found Dolly's animated face and eager confidences more attractive than the rarest postal issues.

When he had gone, Colin's pent-up indignation burst out on the unsuspecting Dolly. She had done it on purpose. She knew Dickinson major came to see his stamps. What did *he* care about her rubbishy dolls? And there she had kept him up in the nursery for hours wasting his time! It was too bad of her, and so on, until she wept with grief and penitence.

And now she was seizing the opportunity of purchasing his forgiveness by an act of atonement in kind, in securing what seemed to her to be probably a stamp of some unknown value—to a boy. But she did not tell all this to Caffyn.

'Do you know about stamps—is this a rare one?' she said, and brought the stamp she had removed to Caffyn. The post-mark had obliterated the name upon it.

'Let's look at the letter,' said Caffyn: and Dolly put it in his hand.



He took it to the window, and gave a slight start. 'When did this come?' he said sharply.

'Just now,' said Dolly; 'a minute or two before you came. I heard the postman, and I ran out into the hall to see the letters drop in the box, and then I saw this one with the stamp, and the box wasn't locked, so I took it out and tore the stamp off. Why do you look like that, Harold? It's only for Mabel, and she won't mind.'

Caffyn was still at the window; he had just received a highly unpleasant shock, and was trying to get over it and adjust himself to the facts revealed by what he held in his hand.

The letter was from India, bore a Colombo postmark, and was in Vincent Holroyd's hand, which Caffyn happened to know; if further proof were required he had it by pressing the thin paper of the envelope against the enclosure beneath, when several words became distinctly legible, besides those visible already through the gap left by the stamp. Thus he read, 'Shall not write again till you——' and lower down Holroyd's full signature.

And the letter had that moment arrived. He saw no other possible conclusion than that, by some extraordinary chance, Holroyd had escaped the fate which was supposed to have befallen him. He was alive; a more dangerous rival after this than ever. This letter might even contain a proposal!

'No use speaking to Mabel after she has once seen this. Confound the fellow! Why the deuce couldn't he stay in the sea? It's just my infernal luck!'

As he thought of the change this letter would work in his prospects, and his own complete powerlessness to prevent it, the gloom and perplexity on his face deepened. He had been congratulating himself on the removal of this particular man as a providential arrangement made with some regard to his own convenience. And to see him resuscitated, at that time of all others, was hard indeed to bear. And yet what could he do?

*(To be continued.)*

*WONDERS OF PHOTOGRAPHY.*

TWENTY years ago, to have one's likeness taken was a trying ordeal. The patient to be operated on was placed in as strained an attitude as the ingenuity of the photographer could devise; his head fixed in something resembling a vice; he was cautioned not to wink for a length of time which seemed to depend on the state of the photographer's temper; and then in the course of a few weeks he received pictures of a staring idiot supposed to be himself. All who were at all proud of their personal appearance—all women and most men—were disgusted with the art. Now all is changed; the operation is generally over in a second or two; freckles, pimples, and cross-eyes are improved away, and everybody is surprised how comely he is. This rapid progress in the art of photography is to some extent due to improvements in lenses and various mechanical appliances, but more especially to the discovery that the salts of silver in combination with gelatine yield a far more sensitive plate than could ever be obtained by the old collodion process.

Within the last two years some remarkable photographs have been taken which show the wonderful perfection to which the art has attained. Likenesses of restless children, crying or laughing, are now so common as hardly to need mention; even the act of kissing, transitory as it is, is sufficiently prolonged to enable a photograph to be taken, the momentary rest, when lips meet lips, are enough for the artist's purpose. But movements far more rapid than the act of kissing (which, after all, is often not so very transitory) are now seized by photography. Athletes performing in mid-air, birds flying, the course of projectiles, waves breaking on the coast, have all been photographed with a definition and clearness that leaves little to be desired. Photos of the Irish mail, rushing along at the rate of forty-five miles an hour, show the outlines perfectly defined; while the spokes of the engine-wheels are plainly delineated, proving the operation to have been so rapid that the wheels had not time to move any appreciable distance. Perhaps, however, the most remarkable photographs of moving objects are those obtained by Mr. Muybridge of horses running and jumping: in these, positions of the

limbs are shown which are far too transitory for the human eye to detect; what the eye sees in watching a horse running is an average of the successive positions assumed by the horse's legs; photography alone can give an accurate idea of their position at any definite point of time. The attitudes shown in photographs seem at first sight to be absurd, and certainly differ very much from representations by engravers and painters; photographs show the real positions at certain moments of time, while painters depict, and rightly too, the apparent positions.

To the astronomer the art is invaluable, and some of the most remarkable discoveries in astronomy have been made by its aid. Large photos of the sun are taken every day it is visible at Greenwich and elsewhere, and thus a permanent record of the exact size and shape of every sunspot is obtained; these, when compared with electrical and other meteorological conditions, will help to settle the question whether and in what way the sunspots affect the weather. To such a perfection has the manufacture of gelatino-bromide of silver attained, that M. Janssen, of Paris, photographs the sun in less than one two-thousandth of a second. Again, the solar corona, as to the nature of which such varied speculations have been rife, is only visible during the very few minutes that a total eclipse of the sun lasts, and the observations that can be made in so short a time are necessarily very imperfect. Recently, however, Dr. Huggins has succeeded in photographing the corona without the intervention of an eclipse. The corona is especially rich in violet rays; now, the eye is less sensitive to small variations in the violet rays than it is to the other colours of the spectrum, whereas the violet is just what photography deals with most effectively. By cutting off the other rays, Dr. Huggins has succeeded in photographing the corona by means of its own violet light, and that, too, at a time when hitherto observations have been impossible. When his method is perfected, astronomers will be able, with the help of the camera, to study the corona and solar protuberances at their leisure.

The recent transit of Venus has afforded a fine opportunity for calculating the distance of the sun, and it is expected that, with the assistance of the hundreds of photographs obtained, the distance of the sun from the earth will be calculated to within 300,000 miles. The numerous comets, too, have not been allowed to pass without leaving their images behind, which show their shapes and positions far more perfectly than has hitherto been

possible. But perhaps the most remarkable achievements are the photographs of spectra of stars and nebulae. Not long ago it was hardly possible to photograph stars of the fourth or fifth magnitude, and even the brighter nebulae shone with far too faint light to enable photographs to be taken. But, recently, not only have the fainter nebulae and stars, as low as those of the fourteenth magnitude which are only visible through most powerful telescopes, been photographed, but their light, even when dispersed by the prism, has still been strong enough to leave its impress on the sensitive plate. Dr. Huggins and Professor H. Draper have each succeeded in photographing spectra of nebulae and stars of the twelfth magnitude, and thus determining some of the elements contained in worlds so distant from us that their light, travelling 186,000 miles per second, has taken thousands of years to reach us. Such photographs are especially useful, because they show the faintest lines in the spectra which have hitherto escaped the most practised eye.

Hardly less remarkable are some of the discoveries of Captain Abney, the prince of photographers, in his experiments on the infra-red of the spectrum; he has recently shown that between the earth and the sun and quite outside our atmosphere, there exist accumulations of benzine and alcoholic derivatives. Alcohol in temperance drinks, alcohol in rain water, *alcohol in space*, alcohol everywhere.

Again, in meteorology the art of photography will prove to be of immense use. A regular system of photographing the clouds by means of a specially made cloud-camera, which acts automatically, has just been commenced. The form and disposition of clouds have always been regarded as an index to the weather, and weather records compared with cloud-photographs will doubtless afford valuable information and assistance in weather prognostications.

To the geographer and ordnance surveyor the camera will soon be regarded as an indispensable part of their outfit. The tedious operations of making sketches of a district will be obviated, and perfect pictures with hardly a chance of error will easily be obtained.

To the medical man too, and the chemist, photography is found to be a valuable assistant. At the Glasgow Medical School the successive stages of surgical operations, sections of tumours and diseased structures, and in fact any remarkable forms of disease, are photographed, and the prints shown to medical students and

distributed among the profession to assist in the diagnosis of rare forms of disease. Dr. Lennox Brown and Mr. Cadett have recently got some wonderful photos of the interior of the larynx. By an adjustment of mirrors in the mouth and the electric light to illuminate the throat, they obtained perfect pictures of the various positions of the laryngeal muscles *during the act of singing*; and we may expect that such photos will be found of great value, not only in the teaching of classes of medical students, but as aids to the study of the mechanism of the voice. Further, Dr. Koch has recently got some remarkable photographs of bacteria and bacilli by the aid of the camera and microscope; and here, again, such pictures may be made of incalculable value in disseminating a knowledge of these minute but most formidable enemies of mankind.

In medical jurisprudence, when it is stated that the crystals formed by the one-thousandth of a grain of arsenic have been successfully photographed, it will easily be seen that, in cases of poisoning, photography may prove a very valuable assistant in the detection of crime. A novel use of the art is now being made in the Municipal Laboratory of Chemistry at Paris; photographs of chocolate, tea, coffee, pepper, milk, cheese, &c., as seen through the microscope, are taken and distributed; and, by comparing samples of such articles with photos of the pure article, an easy method is afforded even to non-professionals of detecting adulteration.

Photography is utilised by the microscopist in other directions. Accurate views have been secured of the most minute objects, just as they appear under the most powerful microscope. Photos of minute diatoms, polycystina, infusoria in motion, bacilli, and trichini have recently been obtained by the writer of this article under a power of 1,000 diameters. The cilia of animalcula, blood corpuscles, the microscopic structure of bone and tissue are shown most distinctly, and details are seen easily which often escape the eye in microscopic examinations. A large photo, six inches in length, of a small fly's tongue measuring about one-seventieth of an inch, shows the hairs and various markings with remarkable clearness. A simple calculation shows this photograph to cover an area 176,000 times as large as the original object. Again, views of the internal structure of wood show conclusively whether the wood is weak or strong: in strong wood the concentric rings appear close in texture, while the radial plates are numerous, broad, and thick. It has even been suggested that such photos

might be used as trade advertisements. The internal structure of metals, too, has been examined by the joint aid of the camera and microscope: laminæ of the metals are reduced to extreme tenuity by the action of acids, and when sufficiently translucent are photographed through the microscope; gold and silver are said to have a fibrous structure, while tin is granular.

Till recently, no one would ever have dreamed of applying photography to acoustics: but it is now possible to photograph sound, or, speaking more accurately, sound-vibrations; and Professor Boltzmann is now announced as the discoverer of what at first might well be regarded with incredulity. The sound-vibrations are communicated to a thin platinum plate, and the movements of the plate, after being magnified by a solar microscope, are reflected on to a screen, and photographed by rapidly drawing a sensitive plate across the image. Every letter when pronounced gives a separate and distinct impression, the vowels showing regular undulatory vibrations, while the consonants give curves and lines of very varied forms. The uses of an arrangement like this may be innumerable. We can almost imagine that when the process is perfected, eavesdroppers and spies will have a very easy time, and need to run no risks in order to obtain secret information; a small instrument secretly placed in a room, and acting automatically, may copy down every word spoken: nay, it is far from chimerical to expect that photography may one day take the place of shorthand reporters.

But besides all the varied ways in which photography has been utilised in science, it has miscellaneous uses without number, and especially noticeable are the ways in which the British and foreign Governments have found it serviceable. No army is now ever despatched on service without a full equipment of photographic requisites. In reconnoitring and surveying the enemy's positions and entrenchments, it was formerly necessary to have sketches made; considerable time was needed, many dangers incurred, and, after all, important details were often accidentally omitted. Now the photographer accompanies the reconnoitring party, and in a second or two he secures views which show the exact positions of the enemy's works without a chance of mistake. Such photos were found of great use in the recent war in Egypt.

Again, during the last siege of Paris, it is well known of what enormous value the pigeon-post was. The beleaguered Parisians were able to keep up correspondence with their friends outside,

in spite of the German army. Letters and despatches were printed on a large sheet which was then photographed to a very small scale on pellicles of six by two centimètres in dimensions ; and these, being tied to the legs of trained pigeons, were carried over the heads of the Germans safely to their destination. The small photos had then only to be placed in an enlarging lantern, the letters transcribed and sent to the various addresses. The Germans have now established a regular system of pigeon-post in all their large towns, in the event of war.

At the Government dockyards, when experiments were being made with torpedoes, the aid of photography was invoked. Rapid views of the torpedo explosions were taken, showing the upraised fountain of water and registering the exact height to which it was thrown. Views of rocks, buildings, or old vessels being blown up with dynamite, show the fragments as it were suspended in the air, the artist being able to expose his plate precisely at the moment required. At Shoeburyness a regular staff of artists was employed in photographing the effects of artillery experiments against iron and steel armour-plates. Again, in many of our prisons, portraits of all prisoners of a certain class are regularly taken, and, if necessary, produced by hundreds and distributed throughout the country. The detective camera, a small instrument which can be held in one hand, may be of incalculable use in obtaining portraits of any suspected persons in the streets, and in this way identification of criminals might be much facilitated.

Recently, quite a novel use has been found for photography. The Chinese, who in their own way are an extremely enterprising race, are troubled with a language which is a stumbling-block not only to foreigners but even to themselves. The number of signs or letters is so great that an ordinary printer's compositor would be perfectly bewildered ; his type case would be a wilderness of boxes ; in fact, to print a newspaper in Chinese would be nearly impossible. An enterprising publisher, however, has recently hit on the plan of having one copy of a newspaper written out and then multiplying the copies by photography, using one of the many mechanical photographic printing processes.

But to enumerate all the wonders of photography is impossible: one more must suffice. It has been found practicable, under certain conditions, to photograph *invisible* objects. It is well known that in the spectrum of white light there are rays which are quite invisible to the human eye: we refer to the



chemical rays beyond the violet end and the ultra-red or heat rays. But the eye is far from perfect, and the rays that it cannot see can still be rendered perceptible by other means; for instance, bisulphate of quinine placed in the invisible chemical rays is at once rendered fluorescent. In a similar way, Captain Abney finds that the bromide of silver used by the photographer can be so modified as to become sensitive to the invisible ultra-red rays; and we are told by Mr. Proctor that he has 'taken the photograph of a kettle of boiling water *in the dark* by means of its own radiation.' In some of the photographs of the great nebula of Orion are clearly seen traces of certain dark bodies in space, which are invisible through the telescope; and it is at any rate not within the region of absurdity to suggest that photography may some day reveal to us the existence of worlds enveloped in perpetual darkness—suns, perhaps once as bright as ours, but whose light has been dimmed by the lapse of millions of years; stars and systems which are no longer visible, but which still move in space in accordance with the unfailing laws of the universe.

*MY POOR WIFE.*

## CHAPTER I.

'If every word were the stroke of a cutting whip, it might ease my heart to write of this pitiful scoundrel. I know I have no power of writing; and, if I had such power, I should not hope to persuade the world. To the world he seems a patriot, an honest man, and, God help me! a sorrowful widower. I know he killed his wife. I know that he killed her as surely as if he had driven a knife into the best and purest heart of all the hearts of women. Perhaps it is she who checks my hand now. It is all that is left for me, to believe that she knows my thoughts, and that she knows too my great love for her. Oh, my darling!—oh, my darling! that you ever fancied that you cared for this vile man. Is not that enough to keep him safe from me? For

him, what good is it to abuse him? He would feel my fingers on his throat, but nothing less. Oh, my love, my darling, that was this man's wife !'

These words I found on a piece of paper which I picked up on the very grave of my poor wife. Of the pain which they caused me in those early days of my sorrow I need say nothing. I have quoted them here because they explain, better than I could, why I have determined to publish this brief record of my married life, which was, alas ! almost as brief. It will be easily believed how painful is this task to me. It is not only that I reopen a recent wound ; but also that I am compelled to raise the curtain which shaded from the world my short domestic life. A public man must become somewhat thick-skinned ; but to one originally sensitive beyond his fellows what can be more painful than to drag into the light of day the tender secrets of his hearth and home ? And yet it will be readily understood that I have no other course. The savage words which head this paper may be amplified at any moment, and published as a libellous attack upon my personal character. It is true that the writer, my poor wife's cousin, after desecrating the very churchyard with his deplorable violence, has taken himself back to his savage life in the far West, to his cattle and his horses, his bowie-knives and revolvers. But there is no safety for me in his absence. Every morning I fear the appearance of some pamphlet, or of some anonymous attack—the true assassin's weapon—in the Press. Thus I am driven, sorely against my will, to anticipate the blow. I shall use all possible delicacy. I shall name no names. But those who watch my career will understand me and believe me, and if the attack be made, I shall be able to point to this brief record, and ask a just and generous public to judge between its temperate statement of facts and the shocking fury of the unhappy young man whose awful words I have quoted.

Who steals my purse steals trash ; 'tis something, nothing ;

'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands ;

But he who filches from me my good name, &c.

It is in defence of my good name that I pen these pages.

A few years ago (it is sad to think how few), when I was conducting that successful campaign, which, by gaining for me my present seat in the House, relieved me for ever from the patronage of a political family, I was attacked by a local magnate with a vehemence which I shall never forget. He not only found fault

with the party to which I am devoted, but he went so far as to accuse me personally in no ambiguous phrases of insincerity and ingratitude. He was popular with his brother sportsmen and with his brother magistrates, but he was a dull fellow. Long ere this he has forgotten that he attacked me: the next day's hunting or the next poaching case must have driven it clean out of his memory; yet I confess that his words stung me. Unjust as they were, I could not forget them. These stupid men, when they are unaccustomed to making speeches, are apt to be brutally frank in their public utterances. Polite enough in private life, they blunder into strong language on the platform. The arts of insinuation and covert satire which we study are to them unknown. They blurt out their crude coarse charges. But it is enough to say that my opponent used the plainest language, and that I, not unnaturally, was stung by it. Of course I showed no sign of my annoyance. I passed by his words with the slightest allusion, the lightest jest; but none the less I confess that I was hurt, and with the pugnacity of a Briton I looked for a chance of returning the blow.

Now, it happened that I heard something, when I was canvassing the neighbourhood, of a claim to some part of my opponent's property. As the claimant had not moved in the matter it seemed unlikely that he had any valid grounds. It was only my habit of noting trifles, even though they seem of no importance, which placed this weapon in my hand. I expected but little from the inquiries, which I made carelessly enough; but I found more than I hoped. The apathy of the claimant, who was a stranger to me, seemed from all accounts to be due less to the weakness of his case than to a pride which approached mania. He enjoyed the reputation of harmless eccentricity; it seemed likely that he enjoyed his grievance. He had never shown a sign of moving in the matter; perhaps he feared that he should lose his grievance and gain nothing more tangible. As soon as I was convinced that the claim against my opponent was not a mere delusion, I transferred the task of private inquiry to a lawyer whom I could trust. He is not my own lawyer, but is one who has his own reasons for keeping me his friend; he had been of service to me on several occasions. He did not keep me long in doubt, and his conclusion was eminently satisfactory. He was convinced of the justice of the claim. I had been working hard at a dull mass of statistics; I felt that I needed a holiday. I determined to combine business

with pleasure. I wrote to the eccentric claimant. I announced that I was going into the southern county where he lived, for a brief period of repose, and I begged that I might call upon him. I explained my strange request by telling him that a legal acquaintance, who gave some part of his time to examining obscure claims to landed property, had called my attention to a case of gross injustice; that as a public man it was my constant wish to remedy injustice where I could; that if he would listen to me for an hour or two I felt sure of convincing him that he was entitled to a small but valuable estate which I named. I ended my letter with sincere apologies for intruding on a stranger my offers of assistance. In answer to mine I received by return of post a most courteous, if somewhat old-fashioned, epistle, in which the writer, after a graceful reference to my public character and to my gratuitous labours in the cause of justice, begged that I would make his house my home during my sojourn in the county where he had been born and bred. On the next day I wrote a few lines of acknowledgment and acceptance, and on the next I followed my letter.

Never shall I forget my first view of the old house. I can see it now as I saw it then. It all comes back to me in my more tender moments. I little knew, as I looked with a gentle pleasure on its venerable and quiet front, that it held the woman who was to be so much to me. Good had it been for me had I compelled the driver beside me to turn his dog-cart from that hospitable door. And yet, how one lingers over this checkered landscape, this brief time of smiles and tears! Though I know that I made a great mistake, how can I resist a feeling of melancholy, which is not wholly sad, as I recall those golden hours which filled the fateful days? One may recall the errors of love with a smile which is not far from tears. As I muse, the old house is clear to me again as on that autumn afternoon. I can see the old stone front, more dignified than spacious, mellowed by time, and yellowed here and there by tiny, close, bright lichen; the broad steps leading to the open doors, the great stone ball on either hand, the stiff stone balustrade which bounds the unseen roof. Spreading over the wide space on the right of the door is plentiful ivy; on the left the Virginia creeper glows with the richest of autumn colour. Where the balustrade is cut in the centre by a stone peak a young ash had forced itself, and, like a stout young sapling, reared its slender length defiantly. This twig on the edge of the roof, with

the ivy which grows quick and luxuriant in that soft air, and the widespread creeper, and the stains of yellow growth upon the stone, suggested to the fanciful mind that Nature had taken the place under her special charge. I am devoted to Nature. Nothing affords me such repose as to turn from the strife of parties to that eternal peace. I marked the details of the scene that I might refresh myself in future days. I paused a moment on the lower step that I might feel the soft autumnal sunlight, which embraced the long stone front from end to end. Some cows were feeding in the long grass before the house; a small hen fluttered anxiously up the steps before me, and, as I followed her, her small brood of chickens hurried out from the uncarpeted hall within and stopped irresolute before me. Smiling at the rustic charm of the whole, with a mind singularly free from all anxiety, I laid my hand upon the bell.

The sound of the bell was almost startling in that quiet time, but scarcely had it broken the afternoon slumber of the house when a door opened on my right, and my host came hurrying into the hall. My first impression was that the little old gentleman must have been a pretty boy; he was slightly and rather delicately made, and wore the everyday dress of a country gentleman with an almost excessive neatness. My second impression was of his suppressed nervousness. When you think that a man is hiding something from you, it is well to look at the corners of his mouth and at the tips of his fingers. The eyes of an impostor will confront yours in most cases without a quiver. The eyes of my host showed nothing but recognition and welcome; but the hand which he held out trembled as I delayed an instant to grasp it, and there was an unnaturally fixed look about his lips. As he began to speak his mouth was tremulous. I knew that he was making an effort to control his feelings. He was determined to show no eagerness. He began to talk quickly of other matters, and to ask questions about my journey. He was persistent in his offers of refreshment; he was fussy in his directions to his servant about my luggage.

When I had humoured the pride of my new friend for a little while (I could hardly help thinking of him as of a spoiled child), I turned rather abruptly to the object of my mission. Even then he was eager to interrupt me with suggestions of indifference. 'It can make little difference to me,' he said; and, a little later, 'I have never cared to move in the matter.' 'It was for my

kinsman to resign it,' he said, with some warmth, when I expressed surprise at his patience; 'after our family quarrel it was of course impossible for me to make secret inquiries into his title.' With such fantastic reasons did he interrupt me, as I quietly and gravely impressed upon him my conviction that he had suffered great injustice; and all the while I was as certain as I was certain of my own identity that I had roused him to the keenest excitement. At last he broke into a high nervous laugh, and laid his hand on my arm. We were still walking up and down

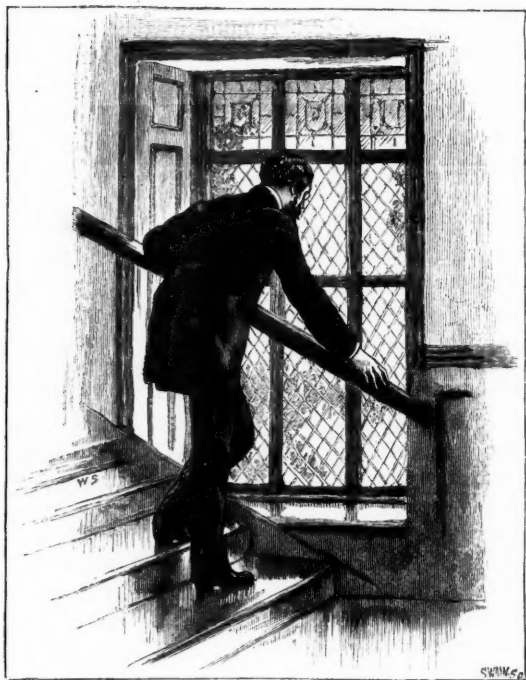


before the door, and his nervous grasp seemed to direct my attention to the road below us. 'If I care at all about it, that's why,' he said, almost incoherently. I looked, and saw his daughter. How can I describe her? And yet, if I do not describe her, this brief account, which I am compelled to write, will be meaningless. I cannot help hoping that this record, which is so painful to me, may not only anticipate a dastardly blow aimed at my character, but may also convey some warning to rash and ardent youth. Where the cautious and prudent err so sadly in



their arrangements for domestic happiness, how shall the headstrong and perfervid hope to succeed ?

The poor child had been running in the meadow with her dog, and had stopped short at sight of us ; she had more colour than usual ; she stood with her hand dropped in light restraint on the collie's head ; her eyes looked frankly up to mine ; she was exquisitely beautiful. The thick fair hair, which was cut short for ease, and did not reach her shoulders, was neither straight nor curly, but every lock seemed ready to curl ; it gave an added delicacy to her delicate face, and made her look younger than she was. Her figure, too, with all its freedom and grace of movement, kept something of the awkwardness of the growing girl—an awkwardness which has its own charm. She might have been the youngest of the nymphs of Artemis ; and even her country-made gown seemed to my fanciful eyes to take the air of virgin draperies. Poor child ! It is sad enough for me to recall that presence full of the very spirit of the innocent country. The description which I have tried to give is more detailed than I should have attempted on that first day of our meeting. Then, though I felt the charm, I saw little else than the eyes upturned to mine—eyes wide apart, and grey and grave, but, more than all, remarkable for their alertness. They seemed like the eyes of one who awaits command. I remember that I fancifully compared their look to that of a little angel ready and very eager to do the divine bidding. She reminded me of a face seen on a church window. When I knew the face better I gradually lost my impression of this alert look, but at first it was always with me ; and now I sometimes see it, as I saw it at first in those grave open eyes which came to mine in the light of that autumn afternoon. Before we had spoken to each other, the dog began to growl—I don't like collies---and the charm was broken.



## CHAPTER II.

DAY followed day in that simple but agreeable home, and each new day was sweeter than the last. I never felt better; I knew that my holiday was doing me good. I gave a few hours to business talk with my host and to the examination of necessary papers; and for the rest I resigned myself to tranquil happiness; I determined to breathe deep the spirit of the place and of the time. It is a peaceful country. The wide grass valley slopes upward into broad grass downs; and between these gentle hills, small woods creep down into hollows where villages nestle. Here and there is a field of roots which are growing for the sheep to eat; everywhere is the tinkle of sheep-bells. If in the morning you open a gate in the lane, you will find it open at eventide. Few men are on the road. You may walk for hours

and see nobody but a couple of stone-breakers, a hedger with a wire hidden in his pocket, a farmer looking for a hare. The sign-posts are green and meaningless: they are of use to nobody but the rook, who perches and explores the cracks; at last they fall, or are helped to fall, and so go to warm the labourer's cottage. In my wanderings in this drowsy land, and in my search for new force, what more natural guide could I find than my host's fair daughter? She was never tired, for all her delicate face and her slight figure. She could vault over a fence like a boy, and run lightly and nimbly. Her quick eyes saw everything in hedge or ditch or sky. She was like a boy: the thick hair standing away from the slender neck, the wide brow, fine cheeks, and pointed chin, made her look like some deft Italian page from an old picture. She was like a boy; and yet she was more like a young angel on a church window, an angel who looked grave, and was ready for action, and waited. I cannot tell when I began to think that she might wait for me: that it would be a keen delight to see those eyes look grave and trustful for my commands: that I might mould this supple creature to my will. At first I dallied with the idea, and found a new delightful luxury. I know my weakness, my sensibility to refined pleasures. It is too late now. I made a great mistake. I might have ruined my life beyond repair. In this brief record I shall not attempt to explain away my error.

At least, I have not to blame myself for undue haste. Even when I had fairly faced the idea of making this beautiful girl my own, I delayed and doubted. I forced myself to assume an impartial position. Cool as I was, I could not long be uncertain of her feeling for me. Though she was not aware of it herself, I knew that she loved me. I am no fop; I have never considered myself as eminently attractive in the eyes of women; though I am not ill-looking, I know well that a rougher style has a more wide success with the gentle sex. And yet I could not blind myself to the affection of this beautiful child. Her eyes sought mine for guidance, and betrayed their love. She was only happy as my companion. The motherless girl had given all her love to the father, who was almost an old man at her birth. As soon as she could think about him, she had found that he needed her loving care; and her daughter's affection had something of a mother's responsibility. She was not blind—though she would have been wretched had she guessed that I detected her clear sight—to her father's weakness and foolish pride. Was it to be

wondered at, then, that she gave her innocent heart to the man who came to her dear one's rescue, and awakened him from a lethargy of discontent to new hope—even to the certainty of victory? Slowly I led her to ask questions about myself; and, while I told her little, I made her show me in her sweet simplicity what manner of man she took me to be. Is there anything more intoxicating for the fighter in life's battle than to find himself appreciated by one innocent and beautiful soul whom the world has had no chance to mar? I at least can imagine no more subtle poison. In her eyes I was a born leader of men. Buried in that obscure corner of England, she had never seen a man whose name is in the papers. She knew nothing of the grades of public men. She regarded me as already a leader of the party, as one of the rulers of the country. From my lofty place she had seen me step down to do an act of justice. My brief holiday, snatched from the service of the State, was devoted to the cause of an injured old man, whom a heartless world had left to pine in an obscure corner of the land. No wonder that I read in her eyes the old sweet tale which Cophetua saw in the eyes of the beggar-maid. She loved me.

Did I love her? Ought I to permit myself to love her? I determined to be deaf to the sound of my heart, and to listen to reason only. Only thus can a man see clearly the path of duty when a woman is by the wayside. In my conduct to the other sex there is little with which I need blame myself. Since my boyish days, when I made love to a pretty cousin in an old suburban garden, I had pretended to no serious devotion. Women had been to me an agreeable accident of life, a soothing influence, a refreshment. I had never allowed them to divert me from my appointed work. When little more than a boy, I had come to a fixed resolution on the marriage question. I would not think of it till I had reached a certain position in the career before me; and then I would only permit myself this luxury under certain conditions. I am not a mercenary man; but I knew well that I must never marry a penniless wife. As a bachelor I was so far wealthy that I could give all my attention to party management and to public affairs. As the husband of a woman who brought me nothing, I should have to give half my energy and half my time to my private business.

To such a narrowing of my life it was my duty not to yield. I had reconciled myself early to my duty. But now the constant

presence of this lovely girl forced me to review my position with more anxiety. I could not tell if she had anything. Of course, I might infer that she would inherit the bulk of the property of her father; and I was now almost confident that her father would be made a richer man by my interference; and, moreover, he was old. Still I could not afford to speak. This man who was in possession might fight the case with the same robust energy which he had directed against me; and I knew enough of the uncertainty and delay of English law to know that the claimant's money might be wasted in the struggle, and the victory remain with the wrong-doer. Besides, there might be other claims on my friend of which the world knew nothing. One can never be sure of these respectable old gentlemen who live lonely lives in the country. But if I could be sure that my wife would have a fortune equal to my own (and I asked no more), I felt sure that this was the wife for me. I foresaw a brilliant social success as the complement of my political progress. She was so beautiful, and so uncommon, that a jaded society would welcome her with rapture. Men would rave about her, and she remain as good and true as when she ran with her dog in the meadows. This dog was, indeed, the only drawback which I could see. She and her collie were inseparable. I have never liked collies; they always appear to me a treacherous class of creatures. This particular dog was positively hateful to me, and he seemed to like me as little. But though it was unpleasant to have a wolf-like animal prowling about one's steps, he was scarcely to be regarded as a serious bar to matrimony. And he was the only bar. If men were likely to rave about my young wife, I counted with even more security on the kindly patronage of the most influential women. She was so young, so beautiful, so innocent, and with manners of such natural refinement, that she must appeal to great ladies of varied experience with an irresistible charm. Then I thought, too, that with all her simplicity she would soon learn to play her part in this new world; that the same eyes which were so quick in observation of bird and beast and flower would not be slow to understand the men and women who were so far more interesting. I was wrong here—I confess it; but was it not a natural mistake? Perhaps one is wrong to prophesy about women: they are strange creatures, as many wise men have discovered. Shall not even the most sober of us feel a tremor of the blood, and a delirious certainty that all must turn to good when he dreams of youth and innocence and

love—and all for him? Am I to be blamed if I credited this beautiful girl with a cleverness which was not hers?

Nothing hindered me from laying bare my whole heart but the uncertainty of the money question. I knew that I ought not to speak till I was certain about the money; but it was hard to stifle the voice of inclination. So hard was it that I determined to absent myself for a little time. Not only would this absence test the strength of my feelings, but I could also make some inquiries about the financial position of my host. I wrote to the same lawyer who had served me so well in this matter; I sent him the fresh evidence about the claim which I had gathered on the spot; and I told him to find out the state of our client's affairs, and if there were any other secret claims upon him. Having written this important letter, I announced my immediate departure. If I had been doubtful of the girl's feelings I should have doubted no longer. When I said, with some proper expressions of regret, that I must go away on the morrow, her delicate cheek grew suddenly paler, and her eyes seemed to grow greater with wonder and sorrow. Lest I should betray my feelings, I hurried away to pack my portmanteau.

The next morning everything was ready for my departure, but I had still time to spare. As I came slowly down the old oak staircase, I was in an autumnal mood, which suited well the stillness and the beauty of the day. The clear October weather showed no sign of change; day after day, when the early mist had melted, the sun shone temperate on golden and red leaf unstirred by any breeze. I remember that I tasted the melancholy of the declining year with a tranquil pleasure as I stepped noiselessly down the old staircase. The windows at the back of the house, where the stone is even more mellow and lovely than in front, are high, and all divided into little diamond panes. Across one of these windows the staircase runs, and there is an oak bar so placed that it seems to invite the idle man to lean and look into the garden below. I did not resist the invitation; I knew that I had plenty of time; I leaned and looked. This little old-fashioned garden was very delightful. It was not well kept, but perhaps it seemed all the more luxuriant on that account. It was full of old-fashioned flowers, of old-fashioned perfumes. It nestled in the angle made by the house and some lower buildings, and all the morning it held the sunlight like a cup. Hives stood against the warm stone wall, and bees went in and out with their murmur

of drowsy industry. Nothing could be more peaceful; I sighed—not sadly—as I leaned on the oaken bar. But I had scarcely looked down into the sweet familiar garden before I saw that my little girl was there, and somebody else beside her. For an instant my tranquil mood was crossed by a spasm of disgust. Then I gave all my attention to watching the demeanour of the pair. What a memory I have! Every gesture, every look, though they would have seemed to most people unimportant enough, remains engraven on my memory.

The new-comer had the advantage of youth, and of a certain kind of beauty. I will write of him with strict impartiality. If I can put aside my love in estimating a woman, I can put aside my just dislike in drawing the picture of a man who has injured me. He is tall and dark, with quick impulsive movements, and black eyes which can look both fierce and tender. I hope he may never in those wild lands, where he elects to live, be tempted to any sudden act of fury or revenge. There is something untamable in his air, something which has led me at moments to suspect some taint of insanity. Perhaps this is the most charitable explanation of his conduct to me; and I wish to be charitable. There was something, too, in his Southern tints and his sudden passions which suggested a taint of negro blood. I found out that his mother was a creole, or some such thing; and a suspicion of the tar-brush is probable, if not certain. Still the young man had a certain beauty, though in spite of his arched feet and lithe active figure it was accompanied by no air of breeding. It needed but a single glance into that sunny garden to show me that this dusky youth was passionately in love with the fair girl whom I had almost destined for myself. How eagerly did my eyes turn from his speaking looks to his gentle companion. If I had read there acceptance of this suitor's ardent passion, I should have gone away and returned no more. Women are such strange creatures that my faith in this girl's love for me had tottered as I looked at this undoubted rival. But when I turned my eyes to her fair face, it was like an open book to me, and therein I read, not only that she did not love this young man, but that she was unconscious of his passion. I do not hesitate to confess that I felt a thrill of triumph, as I was sure that her affection for me blinded her to this obvious devotion of another. Where I stood by the open window their voices came up to me from the garden. She said little, but wandered rather listlessly

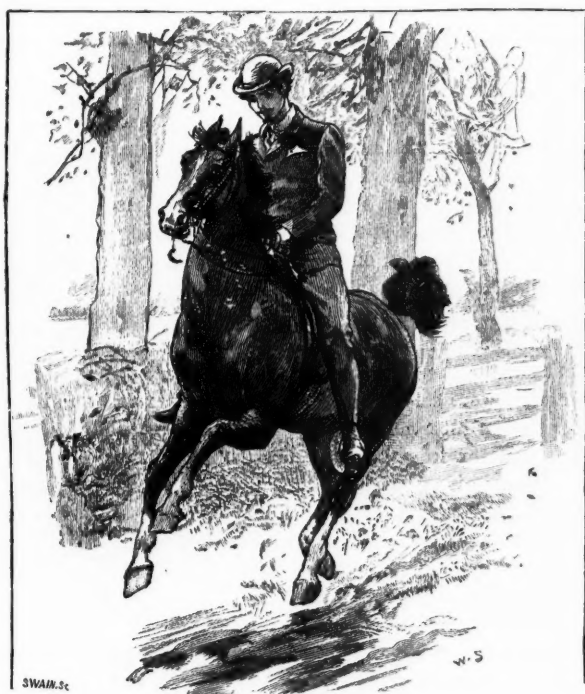


on the narrow unweeded path, stooping now and then to pick a lingering flower, and hugging, whenever she stooped, the rough head of her dog, who seemed to grin with satisfaction. But as her companion followed her slowly, he talked more than enough. He said no word of love—it was only his looks which betrayed that ; but he talked of his wild cattle-lifting or cattle-breeding life in the Western plains ; of long rides ; of bears and Indians ; of camping in the Rockies. It was poor stuff to listen to, and had an



air of braggadocia, which I hoped would not escape the fair young listener. I was pleased that she seemed absent ; I thought that she was thinking of the hour of my going away. The young man was gaitered and spurred and splashed. As she gave small heed to him, he said something suddenly of his hope of riding over again, vaulted the railings, and disappeared. She stood looking after him with a little smile half lighting the sadness of the face. I could not be deceiving myself : the face was paler than usual, and sad for my departure. She smiled at his abruptness, and then she sighed ; I knew that the sigh was for me. If I had

obeyed my inclination, I should have gone down into the sun-steeped garden, and kissed the little pale face. But I was master of my feelings; I went slowly down the rest of the staircase, and going out of the front door betook myself to the stables to make sure of the readiness of the dog-cart. A little later I stood on the wide stone steps and said good-bye. My host was fussing about the luggage, and divided between his wish to detain me



and his fear lest I should miss the train. He had made up his mind to inform his kinsman's lawyer of his new movement in the matter of the property. He had assured me again and again that he could not work longer in the dark. I no longer discouraged him from publishing the affair; it had become most important to me that his prospects should be clearly defined as soon as possible. While he was half holding me back, half push-

ing me down the steps, his daughter stood silent beside him. Suddenly, without a word, but with a quick faint blush, she held out to me the few flowers which I had seen her gather in the old garden. The shadow of coming winter was on them; but she had picked them for me. I held the little hand a moment in mine, and looked into the honest tell-tale eyes. 'I shall come back,' I said, with much intention in my voice.

How true it is that man should trust no seeming gift of fortune! In his own care and prudence let him confide as much as he will; but when he seems most lucky let him take heed. To such thoughts as these I slide, whether I will or no, when I recall this sweet romantic time. Everything seemed to turn out so well that my heart swelled sometimes with all the arrogance of a favourite of fortune. Of course I smiled at my folly, and calmed the tumult of my feelings; but something of the baseless confidence remained; I felt like a spoiled child. Everything seemed to turn out so well. This claim on my opponent's property, which I had thought it hardly worth while to examine, now seemed to me unanswerable. The one girl who had profoundly affected my heart was probably an heiress; and I could not shut my eyes to the fact that she loved me. The lawyer whom I employed and my lesser agents were serving me with unusual dexterity and success. When, after an interval much shorter than I had dared to hope, I received a letter from my late host, who informed me that his kinsman would give up the property in question without a struggle, I almost danced for joy of my brilliant victory. My opponent—the man who had attacked me so crudely, clumsily mixing disapproval of my public career with criticism of my private position—my opponent had made no fight at all. He had scarcely allowed himself time to go through the evidence with his lawyer, when he wrote to the claimant a letter full of extravagant regrets that he had enjoyed even for an hour a property which rightly belonged to another. His protestations were overdone. He declared that though he had been told, on coming into possession, that there was a claim on some part of the estate, he had been content to leave everything to the family lawyer, confident that if there were any grounds for the claim the claimant would soon move in the matter. He almost abused the old gentleman, of whose peculiar pride and nervousness he had clearly no notion, for remaining passive so long. He suggested compensation. It

seemed that there was nothing which he was not willing to do. On the whole, though the letter was over-coloured, it gave me a higher idea of the writer's ability. He was clever enough to see that he had no case, and to come down with grace.

Everything seemed to fall out as I wished. When I had finished the perusal of my late host's characteristic letter, in which his elation was but poorly concealed by phrases studiously cool and conventional allusions to the indifference of old age, and when I had read with even more attention my opponent's impulsive epistle, which had been forwarded to me in the same envelope, I leapt to my feet with the determination to be bold. One must risk something. I would not wait for absolute certainty. I had been making indirect inquiries, and I could hear nothing to the claimant's disadvantage. His neighbours believed him to be over-scrupulous and over-sensitive; there had never been even a rumour of scandal connected with him; there was not the faintest suspicion of any claim upon him, save that of his dear little girl; it was supposed as a matter of course that he would leave her everything. I would not wait for certainty. One must know how to dare. I determined to be bold. I would hasten to congratulate my friend in person; I would listen to my heart, and see the girl I loved; I would trust to myself to secure a fair settlement before my wedding-day. For the rest I would take the plunge without further premeditation. As I stood there with the old man's letters in my hand, and my heart beating, I felt like a romantic boy. The grand old words of Montrose were ringing in my ears. I would put it to the touch; I was ready 'to win or lose it all'; I would greatly dare.

Not yet did Fortune seem weary of showering her gifts upon me. I had established myself comfortably in my favourite corner of the railway carriage, with my plaid about my knees, a little pile of newspapers by my side, and my mind full of thoughts of the dear girl who was awaiting me. I was congratulating myself on my solitude, for I wished to taste the luxury of sentimental dreams; the train was already in motion, when the door was pulled violently open and a young man stumbled into the compartment. As he steadied himself and dropped into his seat, I recognised the dusky youth whom I had seen in the garden with my beloved. Though I had seen him from that pleasant window on the stairs, I knew that he had not seen me. I no longer resented his headlong intrusion, nor sighed for my lost solitude; I

saw my chance in a moment of gaining some further information. I could hardly help laughing at this new gift of Fortune; it seemed as if the fickle goddess had thrown in this lithe mulatto, or creole, or whatever he is, like the last of a baker's dozen.

It needed no skill to get into conversation with my companion. With a quick grin, which showed his white teeth (it is likely enough that the contrast between his dark skin and that gleaming row had been admired by women), he apologised for the suddenness of his entry. I joined in his laughter; I made some light allusion to the weather; I expressed a hope that I should still find bright autumnal weather in the place whither I was bound; and, having thus named the village near which my host lived, I asked the young man if by chance he knew that part of the world. 'Know it!' he cried; 'I know every brick of that village; I was born there; my mother's house is not a stone's throw from it.' 'Then you must know a friend of mine,' I said smiling, and I named my host. It needed but that name to open the flood-gates. The young man's black eyes shone, and his dusky cheek was flushed, as he rushed into a eulogy on his friend. One would have thought that there had never been so honourable, so high-minded an old gentleman. I deprecated with much good humour this excessive praise, and thus easily induced my companion to be more explicit. He told me half-a-dozen stories of my host's kindness to his poorer neighbours. With an assumption of cynicism, I hinted that the kindness of landlords had been sometimes a little too great—a little harmful. At this my friend blazed into indignation. He told me with excessive emphasis that this old gentleman's life from the hour of his birth had been as open as his Bible; that for simple piety he stood alone; that in all the gossip of the country-side, which he, my informant, knew from the first word to the last, there had never been a whisper against this remarkable old man. I hastened to apologise for my cynical tone; to assure him that I shared to the full his good opinion of our common friend; that it did my heart good to hear him praised so warmly. Indeed, I spoke with warmth. I was truly glad to hold so high an opinion of the old gentleman, and my belief that he had no secret claims upon his purse was increased almost to certainty.

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike my impulsive companion, who had been regarding me with a straightforward stare which was almost embarrassing. 'You can't be Mr. ——?' he said, naming

me. 'Yes, I can,' I answered lightly, for of course further disguise was impossible. He stared at me a full minute more, until I laughed nervously. Then, with a quick movement, as if he flung some doubt from him, he stretched out his hand to me. 'You must let me thank you for my old friend's sake.' I spoke lightly of the service which I had rendered the old gentleman. 'No, no,' he cried; 'it was nobly done; it was a fine thing; and from a stranger. If you had known him of course you could not have helped helping him.' Then, with his enthusiasm growing warmer as he spoke, he went on more quickly—'But you had never seen them; that's what makes it great; I am so angry with myself for not having looked into that claim—I had known of it all my life, but I was brought up to think it a mere delusion of the dear old man; I can hardly help hating you for having done it.' I held up my hand in deprecation. 'If you had known them,' he began again; 'but you had never seen them' (he had the air of bringing up my virtues as accusations against me)—'you had never seen her.' He gave a long whistle, as if a sigh went out in it. 'You had never seen her,' he repeated more slowly; 'you did not know what an honour it was to do the least thing for her. She's an angel.' 'You speak with enthusiasm,' I said, smiling. 'Oh, I've been in love with her,' he cried out carelessly, 'ever since I could see.'

Now, though I had recognised this young man's feeling when I saw him with my little girl in the garden, I confess that I experienced a painful thrill when I heard him proclaim his love. It was with difficulty that I preserved the smile with which I listened to him. As I said nothing, he presently spoke again, and spoke more quietly. 'Of course you won't betray me,' he said. 'Of course she knows nothing of this; and she won't know till I've made my pile in Montana. You see, I've nothing yet, except a few beasts; and she'll have money—why, she'll be almost an heiress now—thanks to you.'

'Does she inherit?' I asked carelessly.

'How can she help it?' he asked dismally; 'he hasn't another near relation in the world, and he'd give her his last penny to-morrow, if she asked him. If she asked him! As if she'd ever ask for anything in the world, except his love—and that she has without asking—and the love of all the world if she looked at it.' Then he became silent. I took up a paper, and held it before me, as I thought. After a time I picked up the

talk again by asking him some questions about cattle-breeding in America. He was full of confidence; he scarcely saw the risks for the profits; he was sure that a few more years like the last would make a man of him. He explained to me that he should not stay in America till he had made a fortune, but that he should come back to England as soon as he had saved a small capital. 'Before I go back now,' he said, 'I shall speak to the dear old man, and show him my position, and tell him that I shall come back to her; and if he lets me, I shall say a word to her—just a word of hope—' Here he stopped so long that I thought he had no more to say; but after a time he said slowly and with emphasis, as if he were talking seriously to himself: 'And yet I swear, if I were not going so far away, I'd rather not say a word of love to her yet. It seems like breaking into a shrine.' I suppose that I could not restrain some movement of surprise, for he turned short upon me. 'You don't know what innocence is,' he cried; 'nobody does who isn't her friend—oh, yes, of course, all girls are innocent; but she—she hasn't a thought nor a dream that isn't pure; and she loves me as if I were her dog, or a flower in her garden—and I wish I were.'

Fancy a sane young man talking like that in a railway train, and to a stranger! I could quote more of his wild speeches, if it were worth while: my memory is really extraordinary—I can't forget (alas!) even when I would. One thing became clear to me as I travelled with my wild companion. He was the very last man to whom the happiness of a young girl should be confided. It seemed the most charitable conclusion that his brain was not quite right. I thought of the dear child who awaited me at my journey's end with a spasm of fear. At all risks I must save her from linking her lot with a madman. Even if he could not be called mad, he was clearly so flighty and so unstable that he was unfit to take care of a wife. It is not restless youth, with fierce and tender eyes and olive skins, who make fortunes by the dull methodical business of cattle-breeding. Surely, such men are not constant even in their love. They cannot resist the temptation of women's eyes; and though there was to me something un-English and panther-like in the appearance of this impulsive being, I could suppose that women admired him. When we had reached the familiar station, he swung himself from the carriage, and immediately leapt into it again that he might help me with my lighter luggage. He seemed eager to conciliate me; he had good



reason for trying to secure my friendship. 'Good-bye,' he said; 'I shall see you before you leave them; I shall ride over as soon as my mother will let me. My mother has the first claim on her prodigal; but I shall come as soon as I can.' He spoke of his mother like the hero of a French drama; it was part of that want of reserve which was so unpleasant to me. Nevertheless, civility demanded that I should be polite; I thanked him for his companionship and courtesy, and expressed my hope that we should meet again soon. He wrung my hand fiercely, and climbed quickly into the shabby old dog-cart which awaited him. He flourished his whip, and with some cry to me which I did not understand, drove quickly away.

*(To be continued)*

### *A WAGON TRIP AT THE CAPE.*

ALTHOUGH not what can be termed 'raw,' I am still somewhat of a new hand at the Cape. This is the first time that I have been trusted to convoy a wagon-load of meal (wheat, coarsely ground and generally used as a substitute for Australian flour) from what, in these parts, is termed 'a corn-growing district,' to the 'City of Saints,' Grahamstown, in the eastern province, a distance of over 120 miles.

It is Thursday, a doubtful showery day, and the thunder-clouds drifting overhead make us fear one of those sudden and terrific thunderstorms which come down with such fury during the hot months, about Christmas-time, often turning what before were almost dry watercourses into broad and rapid-flowing torrents. These may stop travelling for many days, and they sometimes wash trees, cattle, sheep, and corn from the adjoining lands.

We are (as is generally the case) in great doubt as to whether we shall be able to start to-day, or any time this month; nevertheless, before breakfast, we send for the herd of oxen, select sixteen of the strongest and fattest, herd them near the homestead, and devote the whole morning to loading and preparing the huge buck-wagon peculiar to the country.

At 2.30 P.M. we are still in doubt, and anxiously watching the dark clouds drifting across the mountains; but at length decide to try a start. Notwithstanding there are twenty-five drifts to be crossed before sunrise to-morrow, I feel tolerably confident of getting through a few of them, although, should the storm burst, and the rivers 'come down,' we must inevitably stick in the immediate neighbourhood of home for some days, with swollen and unfordable torrents before and behind.

My provisions, viz., the carcass of a sheep, a bag of rusks, ditto of potatoes, ditto of coffee, and some bread made of meal are thrown into the wagon. My bed, consisting of sheets, blankets, and counterpane, is made upon a stretcher, slung under the tent at the hinder part of the vehicle, its appearance before we move almost deluding one into the idea that it will be as snug as any bed at home.

The oxen are now driven into a line like a file of soldiers, raw-hide reins are thrown over their long formidable-looking horns, then fastened, and with much shouting and pulling, the pairs of beasts are drawn to their proper yokes, and inspanned, as it is termed. By 3.30 we (that is to say, myself and the two Caffres selected to attend me) are ready. Saying 'good-bye' to the owner of the farm, I give the order 'trek Dinezeer,' and climb into the wagon. Now comes a sight that would astonish, *not* the natives, but any home person. The leader holds on to the rein attached to the two front oxen, and shouts in Caffre; the driver yells out the names of the oxen in quick succession, swinging his long two-handed whip in every direction. Each movement varies the sound from a sharp crack, like the report of a pistol, to a deep sounding pop echoed by the adjacent mountains; and the whip finally lands somewhere on one of the unfortunate team, which starts off at a brisk trot.

Away we go, scrambling over the low bushes and boulders; the cattle fearing nothing but that long heavy piece of raw hide; and the wagon dancing, jumping, pitching, rattling, and creaking as though it would come to pieces every moment. This alarming and decidedly uncomfortable state of things often proves dangerous, and causes serious accidents, but it is considered the correct thing to depart with a grand flourish, amid the excitement and delight of the numerous bystanders. Soon after the first mile, the niggers have yelled themselves hoarse, and we settle down into a steady tramp, only varied by putting on a spurt occasionally when going down the sharp inclines into the drifts, and in urging the oxen, by an extra allowance of whip, to renewed exertions up the opposite banks.

After about fifteen miles, we reach the homestead of a hospitable Dutchman. Here the yokes are taken off the oxen's necks, placed on the ground, and the oxen tied to them to have a rest before their night's work. All travelling is done at night, both on account of its being less exhausting for the cattle than during the heat and glare of the day, and because the daylight is the only time at which they can be let loose to feed. Even then, a most strict watch has to be kept to prevent their getting lost in their restless endeavours to obtain all they can of the parched and scanty herbage. Only give them a chance, and they are off home altogether.

Leaving the cattle lying down and contentedly chewing their

cud, I follow my kind-hearted friend into his house (a low, roughly-built cottage, but considered a good house) to see the 'Vrow und Kinder,' and partake of an acceptable supper in the form of an ostrich-egg omelette. We converse freely upon the state of the crops, cattle, sheep, &c.—topics always uppermost in the bucolic mind. Having made the most of this opportunity to gain all the information possible regarding those parts of the road where grazing and water are still to be found, at 9.30 I make ready to inspan again.

When this is accomplished, the natives having received full and minute instructions to call me at certain dangerous points on the road, I turn into bed half undressed, but ready at a moment's notice to be up and doing in case of emergency. It is impossible to read, as the motion of a wagon will not permit of a light—and to-night's journey among the mountains being rougher than usual (even in South Africa), the fraction of a wink of sleep is also out of the question. So I lie on my back with elbows well out, yet bouncing about like a shuttlecock; at one moment banging my head against the lantern on one side, and then being jerked vigorously against the opposite extremity of the tent—in fact, it is the superlative of perpetual motion.

However, at last the worst part of the road is safely passed; and meeting a wagon about to tie fast at one o'clock A.M., we decide to give our oxen the usual rest. The yokes are therefore taken off, and the boys (all natives are so called) commence to light a fire and prepare the inevitable black coffee. Knowing their slow ways, I take the opportunity of indulging in forty winks, and am only awakened by hearing a voice at the back of the wagon calling, 'Côfēēē, baas,' with the appearance of a dusky hand bearing a tin mug of the boiling liquor, minus both milk and sugar. My throat, however, fails to appreciate what is nectar to a Caffre, so I turn out to enjoy the fire and hear the gossip.

A white Scotch mist hangs close overhead, entirely obscuring the moon. Around the fire between the wagons squat a group of savages, each enveloped in his kaross or discarded military cloak, and smoking an enormous pipe filled with coarse green Boer tobacco. Their countenances, as disclosed by the reflecting light, look even more hideous and unearthly than usual; while beyond, and but just visible in the red glow of the embers, are the long lines of oxen. The hard and sandy desert stretches away into the darkness, forming a fitting background to the weird

picture, and almost misleading one into the idea that we are the only remnants of life left in the country.

We trek on, and at sunrise find ourselves close to a shallow dam, somewhat redder than the surrounding country. Our night's work is done, the oxen are turned loose, and after wading into the water stroll off in charge of the leader. Then the driver slowly (how slowly none unaccustomed to the Caffre way of doing things can imagine) sets things to rights, lights a fire, replenishes our stock of water from the aforesaid dam, and prepares the meal of the day by chopping the mutton up into small pieces on the worn and greasy disselboom (pole), and putting it to boil with some potatoes.

As usual at the sight and smell of cooking, sundry wandering and hungry-looking Caffres make their appearance 'like vultures that scent the battle from afar.' These hang about gossiping until the boys bestow upon them something in the way of food, and then pass on. It is useless remonstrating with one's escort on such occasions as the present, and saying, 'We shall run short of provisions.' The visitors are always introduced as 'dear relations,' but are in reality the natives' only newspaper. At this, the customary appeal, I cannot be hard (although I know what it means, as will be seen hereafter), for have I not my own old newspaper from England wherewith to solace myself until eleven o'clock, at which hour the rough stew is ready and very acceptable? Then shaking the dust off one's clothing, an attempt at washing is made in the muddy dam, a sleep is got through the hot hours of the day, and at four o'clock we inspan and are off again.

This evening's journey is rather more interesting than the last, the road is not so hilly, and consequently less rough and tiring. We pass a few ostrich farms with their enclosed camps, the sight of which little oases in so sterile a country is quite cheering.

On an undulating plain we see a few herds of springboks, an antelope now fast disappearing and only existing here on account of being carefully preserved.

Another sight is that of a farmer with 'an addition to his family.' He has (as is the usual custom) hired a house for two or three months in a town, and is now taking his wife and infant home, to introduce the latter to its elder brothers and sisters. The husband considers that his wife has had her holiday, and probably she will not see a town again for a year to come, or

maybe several. Two women, whom I knew to be well off and fairly educated, were tramping behind the wagon, a mass of dust and dirt, yet quite contented; and they would have told you, had you cared to inquire, that ox-wagon travelling was as good as any in the world.

This slow tramp through a monotonous, waterless waste, with the usual mountains in the distance and nothing to occupy the mind, seems ineffably dreary to one accustomed to English railway travel, and I amuse myself by helping the leader to obtain a little fuel for to-night's fire, as now is our only chance.

We are on the main road from the diamond fields to the coast, and have outspanned on a piece of Government ground reserved for that purpose. Around us are fifteen large wagons laden with wool, on its way from the Orange Free State for shipment to England. Our camping-ground is on the side of a mountain against which the wind blows terrifically, requiring the bucksails to be lashed over the top and down to the ground on the windward side of the wagons. Under one of these a Dutchman is busy kneading bread, made on such occasions without fermentation, in the form of a large solid wagon wheel, and then baked in the centre of the ashes of a wood fire. Several sheep tied to the wagons are watching the cooking-pots on the fires, and looking so distressed that one cannot help thinking they know the fate in store for them.

Whilst returning from a stroll to see that the oxen are safe, I am accosted by a tall, dirty-looking young man, dressed in dilapidated corduroys, who asks if I have seen any oxen. Thereupon, I take him to a group of skins and bones that have left flesh behind them; and learn that he, their happy proprietor, has made a most successful trip. 'Only four head lost from six spans, and the rest, with the exception of two, look tolerably up to completing the journey.' My new acquaintance gives me an invitation to dinner, which I gladly accept, and go to what is his migratory house during six months in the year. After climbing up a double row of wool bales, we crawl into the top of a small tent, simply lined with green baize. There I behold luxuries which I have not seen for many a long day, viz. tinned beef, pickles, condensed milk, and a small tin of butter, originally from England, but lately obtained from a Free State town. This may seem curious to those who have not experienced country life on the 'Frontier,' where butter and milk are often scarce articles for a considerable part of the year, and beef is hardly ever seen; inferior mutton,

boiled mealies (maize), and other cereals, being our chief diet. All the above luxuries at the same time, together with a sooty cauldron of stew, are enjoyed by me more than any 'City Dinner.' My host enters into details regarding himself. He and his brother are transport riders (carriers) and the fortunate proprietors of a large farm and several thousand pounds' worth of wagons, oxen, and gear. They relieve each other alternately to keep things constantly on the road, and desire nothing better than such work so long as a living is to be made by it.

It is now 3 P.M., and I must prepare to resume my journey. My friend begs me to wait for him—he will be off soon—but, not having so much faith in his 'lean kine' as in my own farm cattle, I make ready. After receiving a few warnings with regard to the dangers of the road, and an assurance that he will catch me up, we part for the rest of the journey.

Being now on the 'main transport line,' skeletons of oxen are frequently passed. They are the remains of poor unfortunates which have died in the yoke, or worse, being unable to keep on their legs any longer, have been thus cruelly left to perish from starvation, the vultures doing the work that the natives would gladly have undertaken had time permitted.

The locality is called the 'Fish River Bush.' A rocky district, covered with bush and prickly pears, upon which all creatures are compelled to subsist, for grass or herbage is unknown. It is one of the few remaining strongholds for game.

Soon we see the Great Fish River in the valley below, and after several hours more travelling, we reach the hotel and toll-house on its banks. This being also the first 'Winkel' or general shop, the driver, as I anticipated, informs me with much grimacing, that the coffee is finished; but, knowing the reason of this failure in the commissariat, I resolve to deprive myself of the luxury for the rest of the journey; and he perforce must follow my example, as a slight punishment for his lavish expenditure of that article and a warning to be more economical in future.

We soon cross over an iron bridge, forty feet in height above the level of the water—no unnecessary precaution in this country, for its predecessor, equally high, was carried away in a flood a few years ago.

Arrived at what was once the 'Frontier Boundary' of the colony, and which is the last watering-place, we stop for supper. In the dark distance we occasionally hear the yelling of drivers,



the crack of whips and heavy rumbling of wagons, which supply the Free State, Kimberley, and Diamond Fields with the necessities of life. The proximity of these cheering sounds acquaints one with the fact that there is a sprinkling of civilised people in these lone melancholy regions.

As it is Saturday evening and we wish to reach Monday morning's market, we remain here throughout the night so that the oxen may be fit to hurry through the rest of the journey without a drink.

Somewhat early on Sunday morning we trek on, passing a few transport trains of wool outspanned like our friends of Saturday. We slowly approach, not a church with bells ringing for morning service, but the entrance to what is appropriately termed 'Hell Port,' an unpleasant pass justly compared to the infernal regions on account of the intense heat concentrated by the sun at this point. A few abandoned and baked-up hovels near the roadside tell, more graphically than words can paint, the want of water; for notwithstanding the efforts of Africanders to conceal all drawbacks, this one fact always has prevented progress, and must continue to do so.

Threading the windings of the mountain side, we ascend gradually into a drizzling mist, which forms the surface of the dust into a paste, not pleasant, but decidedly preferable to the thick cloud raised by beasts in the sun. I will not attempt to relate the many tales of peace and war told by colonists in connection with this pass, but proceed to the next hotel—a small, low cottage at the 'Poort Exit'—possessing a large artificial dam as dry as the whole valley. Involuntarily, I glance towards the 'final scene' of a chequered career—that of a well-educated Englishman, who, after becoming a wanderer, tramp, and 'Jack-of-all-trades,' married the former landlady of this uninviting abode. He shot both her and himself in a drunken fit, was dragged away by the heels, and only covered with earth at the intercession of a few of the passing travellers who discovered the catastrophe and 'dropped the curtain.' Nothing marks the spot where murderer and victim lie apart, soon to be forgotten in this ever-changing world.

At a short distance from this place, we stop for a meal; and with the darkness commences the mournful wail of jackals, echoing in all directions, and serenading us with their 'Evening Hymn' until we are off again and out of hearing.

On we jolt and creak through Sunday night, dawn disclosing the blue gum-trees planted around the prettiest town of the Eastern Province.

At length the 120 miles are accomplished by our arrival at the Market Square at six A.M. We take our place in the long line of wagons laden with wood, corn, skins, vegetables, and other natural productions. Arranged in small lots on the ground and benches around us are live stock, poultry, hides, meat, pumpkins and other vegetables; fruit, butter, bottles of milk, and in fact anything that the population wish to dispose of; for every imaginable thing, good, bad, or indifferent, has a sale at a South African market.

Whilst we are engaged in taking down and opening a sample bag of meal, a ragged loafer (with nothing to recommend him save a skin that was once white) asks if I require an 'agent,' meaning a man to direct our wagon to the houses of customers. This gentleman's fee is 7s. 6d., an imposition to which I submit for reasons that will soon be apparent.

People in various *negligé* costumes are hurrying to the square from all quarters of the town; and as soon as our sample is opened, the buyers gather round, tasting the meal, and asking innumerable questions, Is it sweet? Where does it come from? and so on.

Punctually at seven o'clock the market master and his clerk make their appearance and the auction commences—vegetables, meat, fruit, cattle, hides, &c., are gradually 'knocked down,' and comes our turn. Two bags go to Jones, three to Smith, one to Robinson, and so on, until the whole load has been disposed of, at various prices.

When the market is over, I receive a slip of paper with the names of my customers and the prices they have given, but no addresses. Now comes the use of my 'agent'; he knows these people and where they live; so, giving him the lists, I despatch him with the wagon. Had I attempted to deliver the load myself, I might have been tramping backwards and forwards about the town all day, in dire perplexity as to the identity of Jones, Smith, and Robinson.

My responsibility has ceased until twelve o'clock noon, and I retire to have a general clean up and breakfast, and to don more civilised garments, in order to make myself presentable for indulging in a stroll down town.

I need hardly describe the curious sensations one has upon being once more in civilised society, seeing stores with all their varieties of manufactured goods, and well-dressed ladies walking about, after a lengthy sojourn in the wilds; but will pass on to noon, at which time I duly present myself at the market master's office. Here I meet my 'agent,' find that the load has been delivered, the money paid in, and receive my cheque.

Such is wagon-travelling in South Africa, which every man who leads a country life there must needs experience.

Many respectable young men, who have been brought up in luxurious England, and go to the Cape with a few hundred pounds and the assurance that they are 'bound to make a fortune,' upon finding they cannot obtain employment, invest in a wagon or so (costing with oxen and gear about 300*l.* each) and become 'transport riders.' Their wagon is their home, and they may make a few successful trips; but I fear that in most cases they do not see their capital again.

In concluding, I hope that my endeavours to describe 'A wagon journey at the Cape' may be of some service to young men who think of pushing their fortunes in the colony. But let me warn those who with small means desire to see the country and experience its life, that they may have to sleep in the open in all weathers and to learn long fasting; and, above all, let them beware of disinterested acquaintances who may be anxious to invest their capital to the best advantage.

